This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

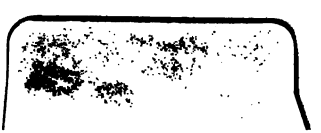
+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

600064451Q



MONKS-HOLLOW.

A Novel.

"Tout vient à lui qui sait attendre."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
TINSLEY BROTHERS, 8, CATHERINE ST., STRAND.
1883.

PRINTED BY
KELLY AND CO. GATE STREET, LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS, W.C.,
AND KINGSTON-ON-THAMES.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER.	PAGE.
I.—Helen in Trouble	1
II.—A Winning Card	12
III.—A Heartrending Appeal	27
IV.—Evelyn has a Fit of Jealousy	43
V.—Lady Redgrave's Story	58
VI.—Lady Redgrave Hears a Little Scandal	67
VII.—An Accepted Suitor	91
VIII.—Miss Vane	99
IX.—A Dinner at the Orleans'	122
X.—A Bitter Awakening	144
XI.—A Deadly Encounter	161
XII.—An Unexpected Return	178
XIII.—The Price He Asked	196
XIV.—Will You Forgive Me?	224

MONKS-HOLLOW.

CHAPTER I.

HELEN IN TROUBLE.

THE London season had commenced early, and town was rapidly filling, although bitter March winds and clouds of dust were still in full force.

The Redgraves were located in a charming little residence near Eaton Square, and within a stone's throw of Sir Felix Shafto's family mansion.

Lady Redgrave's engagements were becoming numerous, and she and Helen Shafto were constantly together; Lady Shafto often availing herself of Sylvia's chaperonage for her daughter, when fatigue or indisposition prevented her going out.

"Sylvia," said Sir Jasper, one gusty morning, coming into the dining-room where his wife and son sat at luncheon, "I have just met an old friend of yours."

"Indeed? I cannot guess who it is; but do come and sit down, the cutlets will be quite cold."

"I went into the club just now," continued Sir Jasper; helping himself to salmon; "and there was Carew."

His wife made no reply, she was busy just then, cutting up Flo's dinner.

"I told him we were staying here, and he promised to look me up, said he might call in this afternoon. If he comes, you had better ask him to dine here to-morrow; you have room for him, haven't you?"

"Yes;" replied his wife, turning a pink cheek towards him; "I shall be glad of another to take Mr. Cleveland's place; I was afraid it would be too late to invite anyone else."

Sir Jasper glanced at her with a grim smile.

"I am thankful you have got over those cursedly ridiculous ideas you had in your head about him," he remarked, with a due disregard for her feelings.

She blushed and looked up quickly at the tall and solemn butler, standing behind her husband's chair.

"I daresay I was very foolish, but pray say no more at present," she said, with some confusion.

Sir Jasper was apt to treat servants very much as sticks and stones; he never credited them with sight or hearing, and his peculiarity in this respect was often very trying to his wife.

"What are you going to do, this afternoon?" he asked presently.

"I am going to take Helen Shafto to the private view of Mr. ——'s pictures, and you know this evening we dine with the Hiltons."

Luncheon over, Sir Jasper took his departure, and Sylvia having made a few alterations in her toilette, sat down in her drawing-room with a novel.

The room was a pretty one, arranged in the present fashion, in tender faded blues and yellows; with quaint and costly nick-nacks brought from home, oriental brocades for table covers, and, as usual, heaps of flowers.

Flowers bloomed out with young green ferns from the wide windows, and blossomed with subtle fragrance on every table and mantel-shelf.

She turned over the leaves of her book, but could not fix her attention on its imaginary joys and woes. No, her thoughts had travelled back through long years to those early days in Malta—and Major Carew.

How foolish she had been! No wonder Jasper had laughed at her. No doubt *he* had liked her very much, but that was scarcely to be wondered at considering they had once been engaged. It was silly to have sent him away, and prevented him from coming to Beech-hurst, and all through the foolish chattering of a gossiping woman.

So she mused until the sudden opening of the door, and the announcement of Major Carew, made her heart beat, and a faint pink tinge, soft as one of the azalea blooms beside her, to steal into her cheek.

And he, standing for an instant on the threshold, took in at a glance the perfect room, the face of the woman he had so loved, looking up at him with a pathetic softness in her dark liquid eyes, the fragrant scent of the flowers, the books, and music, and the hundred trifles which denote a refined and feminine presence, the graceful figure reclining in the lounging-chair, clad in some harmonious costume of velvet and cashmere, and holding out one slender white hand to him, which he took eagerly, saying in a low voice:

"I am so glad to see you again."

"You are quite a stranger," she remarked, smiling, as he subsided into a chair near her own, and she noticed how well he looked, and how thorough-bred in his plain, perfectly-fitting clothes.

Then he told her of all his doings since they had met.

How he had hunted in Leicestershire, spent a fortnight with his uncle, taken a trip to Denmark with Trevor of the —th in the coldest of weather in a yacht, only arriving in town the previous day, where, by good fortune, he had met Sir Jasper.

"We are expecting a few friends to dine with us to-morrow, you will join us I hope?" said Sylvia, presently.

"I shall be most happy. Sir Jasper tells me you are full of engagements."

"I am going out a good deal."

"How is Miss Shafto? I hear everywhere that she and Sir Philip Caryl are engaged; is it true?"

"No, indeed it is not. She is dreadfully worried about it, and really begins to look quite ill. He follows her like her shadow."

"When did they come to town?"

"Only last week."

"Sir Philip is staying at Longs. Between ourselves, I do not think the possession of

Monks-Hollow gives him as much pleasure as it should do. He seems restless and pre-occupied."

"Ah!" said Carew, laughing, "I suppose that is not to be wondered at if he is really in love, and especially if he is aware of Miss Shafto's aversion to him."

"If he thinks that he has no chance with her, why does he not give her up entirely, and go away for a time?" remarked Lady Redgrave, musingly, her eyes fixed upon the fire, until, becoming aware of the Major's earnest gaze, she looked up with a slight accession of colour.

"Because he knows that as he truly loves her no change of scene, no amount of gaiety, or distraction of mind or body will banish her image from his mind;" and George Carew took his hat and rose to depart.

"You speak as one having authority," returned Sylvia, with a faint smile.

"Perhaps I do; *experientia docet*, Lady Redgrave," he replied, gravely, as he held

her hand for a second in a warm grasp.

Sylvia went to the window and watched the tall well-knit figure down the street, then, finding it just four o'clock, ran upstairs to dress for her drive.

"We will go home and have some tea," said she, a couple of hours later, to Helen, as they came out from Mr. ——'s studio; "it is too cold for the Park this afternoon, and I want to have a talk with you, it is so long since we had an hour to ourselves."

Helen assented gladly, and they got into Lady Redgrave's tiny brougham and were driven back to her house.

Helen threw off her heavy velvet jacket, and leant wearily back in her low chair, in front of the blazing fire, whilst the silver lamps shed a soft pink light through their rosy shades over the comfortable room.

"This is much nicer than the Park, Nell," said Lady Redgrave, with a sigh of content as she poured out the tea into quaint

Japanese cups; "we should have been frozen there."

"Yes, indeed. I feel at rest here, Sylvia; this is the only place where I find peace."

Lady Redgrave glanced at her friend enquiringly. She looked ill and unhappy, and Sylvia's heart ached for her.

"Are things so bad at home, Nell?" she asked, gently.

"They are worse than ever. Oh, Sylvia! Sir Philip Caryl has renewed his proposal to me, and my mother says I must accept him."

Lady Redgrave started. "How can he have the audacity to persecute you in this way!" she exclaimed.

"I am afraid he has some hold over papa," in a low voice.

"What makes you think so?"

"Because papa seems so dreadfully afraid of offending him; I suppose I ought not to tell you this, Sylvia, but I am so anxious and worried that I cannot keep it to myself any longer. Sometimes I think

if I consent, all this persecution will cease. Oh! what do you advise me to do, dear?" and she sank down upon the soft, white rug, and leant her russet brown head against Sylvia's knee.

"Your persecution would cease, you say; but for how long? Do you not think that the exchange from comparative freedom to that of absolute, abject slavery, as it would be to marry a man you hate, would be worse than any amount of worry? Nell," she continued, earnestly, "do not let them talk you into this. I implore you, as you value your happiness, hold out a little longer. Think of Raymond; why he would go out of his mind at the idea of your marrying Philip."

"Poor Ray! Mother talks to me by the hour of my ruining his prospects; that he ought not to think of marriage for I do not know how long; that without a wife he can do very well, and so on, till I am so sick of of the theme, that I feel I should like to go into a convent."

"My dear, why do you not write to Ray and tell him everything?"

"How can I? He could not return home now with honour, and it would worry him terribly to know all this, and he so far away, so utterly unable to help me. No, I suppose I must, as you say, hold out; but you have no idea how painful my life at home is now."

"I can well believe it, dear; but be hopeful, Nell, there are brighter days, I trust, in store for you."

"Now I must go, Sylvia, or mother will be thinking I am lost," and rising, Nell got into her hat and jacket, and after a most loving embrace, walked back to Belgrave Square, escorted by the butler.

CHAPTER II.

A WINNING CARD.

SIR PHILIP CARYL had only been in town a few days, and was located at Long's whilst looking out for rooms in a fashionable part. In his present altered circumstances, his former chambers in Torrington Square were not to be thought of.

One morning, as Sir Felix Shafto sat writing in his study, Philip was announced. He greeted Sir Felix very warmly, enquired after the ladies, and then, with a decided air to business, drew up his chair to the table and began :

"Sir Felix, I have come to have some serious talk with you."

Sir Felix turned ashy pale and his hands clutched the arms of his chair almost convulsively.

"I have been looking over my grandfather's papers lately, and I find that not only Shafto Court is heavily mortgaged to him, and consequently now to me, but that he has advanced you a considerable sum of money at different times. Some of it seems to have been paid off, of course you have the receipts, but there is a great deal still owing. Here are the deeds, doubtless you recognise them," and he took a bundle of parchments from his pocket and spread them out on the table.

"I should be very sorry to put you to any inconvenience, Sir Felix, but that money would be very useful to me just now; I am anxious to invest it in some mining shares in which I am much interested. I suppose you are not in a position to pay it all into my account at once?"

The baronet gasped for breath.

"I shall be utterly ruined!"

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Philip, eyeing the old man narrowly.

"That debt has been the curse of my life," returned the other. "As you see, I have paid off a considerable amount, thirteen thousand still remains. All my property is mortgaged, and I could not possibly realize such a sum. For God's sake do not press me. Give me time and I will let you have it by instalments."

Philip's keen, dark eyes flashed, and a smile of triumph curled his thin lips; he drew his chair closer to the baronet, saying: "I have no desire to be hard on you. You have it in your power to grant me a favour, to give into my possession a priceless treasure upon which I have set my heart; when it is mine the debt that weighs upon you so heavily shall be cancelled."

Sir Felix Shafto stared at his visitor in utter surprise.

"A priceless gift!" he repeated; "what do you mean?"

"Your daughter, Helen," and Sir Philip Caryl got up and walked to the window.

He had played his trump card, would it win him the trick?

After a moment of deep silence, he returned to his seat, and said, in an agitated voice:

"I love your daughter most devotedly, and I will do my utmost to make her happy."

"But she has refused you twice," replied Sir Felix, hesitatingly.

"She has, but I am so deeply attached to her that I cannot give up all hope. I will leave you to speak to her for me."

"And suppose she again refuses to listen to you?"

There is a pause; Sir Felix looks white and anxious, whilst Philip's dark eyes wander anywhere except to his victim's face; then he says, steadily: "I shall give you four months, and then enforce my claim; I have cared for Helen for so long, and I know I can make her happy. Any sum you like to name shall be settled upon her; you can arrange this if you choose,

and I trust that when we next meet I shall have the happiness of knowing that I am her accepted suitor," and here he rose, holding out his hand to the baronet, who took it hesitatingly.

"I will do my best for you, Philip, rest assured; but promise me that you will be good to her."

"There is no need to ask me that; as God is my witness, I will devote my whole life to her."

Then he turned away, and Sir Felix dropped into his chair, and buried his face in his hands.

Presently came a knock at the door, and his daughter's bright face peeped in:

"Papa, are you not coming to luncheon? you and I are alone to-day; do you remember, mamma is gone to the Beresford's? Are you ill, dear papa?" she asked, anxiously.

Sir Felix looked up impatiently, and could not help thinking how lovely she was in her short, perfectly-fitting black velvet

dress, with her burnished hair gathered into a soft mass low down upon her head, and a few little wavy locks falling upon her pure brow.

"I cannot come to luncheon to-day, child, I am not well."

"Do come, papa, I have one or two of your favourite dishes for you, and I am so lonely," she pleaded; and, passing her arm through his, led him away.

It was a very delicate repast to which they sat down, consisting of a Strasbourg paté, a timbale of chicken, flanked by a bottle of Sir Felix's special "Chateau Margaux," and some hot-house grapes.

But the baronet's appetite failed him, and though he drank his wine, he eat scarcely anything.

"Nell, I had rather unpleasant news to-day; I will tell you about it if you will come into my study presently. Have you any engagement for this afternoon?"

"Nothing particular, papa; I have to call for mother at three o'clock, but if

you want me I can easily send her a note."

"You had better do so."

Much wondering, and with a vague uneasiness in her heart, Helen despatched her note to my lady, and then followed her father to his study.

"Philip Caryl was here this morning," he began, rather nervously.

Helen started, and turned deadly pale—she felt what was coming, but she replied bravely:

"I did not know it, papa, I am glad I was not at home."

"How is it that you do not like him, my dear? Surely he is a most suitable husband for you, and you know how much we desire this marriage."

"You forget my engagement to Raymond," returned Helen, tremulously.

"Pshaw!" interrupted Sir Felix, "that is out of the question. Nell, Philip brought me some very bad news this morning."

"It is not about Ray, is it?" asked Helen, earnestly.

"Raymond! no, of course not. How you keep harping upon that subject," said the baronet, testily. "Helen," he continued, "I want you to do something to please me."

"Papa, I will do anything to help you, if you are in trouble."

"Anything, Nell? Do you know what it is I want?"—(after a pause)—"it is that you accept Philip Caryl. No, listen!" as with a despairing gesture she was about to interrupt him, "I am terribly in his debt; the money I owe him can never be realized, but on the day that you become his wife that debt will be cancelled."

"Suppose I still refuse?" asked Helen, with trembling lips, and fear and aversion in her eyes.

"Then I am a ruined man! Shafto Court and this house are heavily mortgaged, money is and has always been scarce with us. We have always impressed

upon you that you must make a wealthy match. Every year my affairs become more and more complicated. Helen, you can save us. Only accept Sir Philip Caryl, and I am released from the load of debt and difficulties that have hampered me for so many years."

"If you are so in debt why live in this state and luxury, papa? It is dishonest and wrong; we should be contented with only the Court."

"One has a certain position to maintain, my dear," he replied, somewhat pompously. "You do not understand these things, Helen."

"I do not indeed," she returned, wearily; "but surely things are not so bad; there must be some way of getting out of this. I will see Philip, and beg him to give you a little time. If he loves me he will show some pity for us. Oh! I cannot marry him, do not ask me, I cannot!" and the poor child burst into a flood of bitter tears.

"There, there, do not cry. I will go

down to Lincoln's Inn and see Small, and ask him what can be done, though I fear it is almost useless. For God's sake, Helen, think over it quietly while I am gone, and try to make up your mind to like him, for see no alternative but ruin."

And then Sir Felix kissed his daughter affectionately, and got away, inwardly congratulating himself that there had been no scene.

"I'll get my lady to talk to her now. As to refusing him, it is out of the question. I have no doubt that when she has been married a month or two she will be as happy as anyone else."

So he put on his hat and gloves, sent for a hansom, and was whirled away, feeling at least ten years younger, and as if a load had been lifted from his shoulders. What mattered the sacrifice of his daughter's happiness to this selfish man, so long as he sustained his position of a wealthy baronet in the eyes of the world; he had gambled away his property in idle speculations, and

now looked to his daughter to save him from ruin.

Truly are the sins of the fathers visited upon the children.

Helen rushed up to her room, and seating herself by the window tried to think the matter over quietly. But as the truth slowly dawned upon her, she gave way to her grief and despair.

There was no hope for her, no help—none! Nothing could avert this awful fate, she must marry Philip Caryl, and henceforth she and Raymond must be parted by an insurmountable barrier.

She sat there for a long time with her head buried in the cushions of her chair, then she arose, opened her writing case, and began a letter.

There were only a few lines; they were these:

"I am overcome with grief at the news I have heard to-day. I cannot realize it. Will you give me one month to consider your proposal? I am asking a great

favour of you, but I trust to your generosity to grant it.

"H. S."

"I must gain time," she said to herself, as she sealed the envelope, and having directed it, rang for her maid to send it to the post.

When Philip received it, he smiled grimly to himself. He felt that he was winning, and could afford to be generous; and knowing what a high-spirited girl he had to deal with, he was certain it would not do to push matters too urgently.

So he sat down, and wrote the following:

"Dear Helen,

"It shall be as you like; I will leave you for six weeks, for I have to go up to Scotland in a few days to look after the property there. When I return, I trust I shall have the happiness of receiving an affirmative answer from your lips.

"Believe me,

"Always your most devoted

"PHILIP CARYL."

When Helen received it she breathed a sigh of intense relief and thankfulness. He was going away! What joy! She would no longer be haunted by his gloomy face at every dance and entertainment to which she was bidden. And perhaps in the meantime something would turn up; with the hopefulness of youth, she felt that surely something must happen to prevent such a fearful calamity. Perhaps after all, if he knew how averse she was to this marriage he would spare her. What should she do to help her father? Visions of books that she had read, where high-born girls went out as governesses, or painted wonderful pictures, and made their fortunes, floated through her brain, and then she laughed bitterly to herself as she remembered how utterly futile such things were.

She little knew of the tempest of love and admiration which she had raised in Philip's breast. A passion that made him utterly and entirely reckless of everything save the triumph of winning her for him-

self and from his cousin, whom he now hated. That alone added a zest to the pursuit, and now that the trump cards were in his hand was it likely he would forego his victory?

He believed his love for her would overcome her coldness, her aversion; so turned a deaf ear to his reasoning powers, which bade him pause before he linked himself to a woman whose whole heart was given to another, and who hated and despised him for his unworthy persistence.

So the time sped away, and she was left comparatively at peace. It was now early May, and town was fast filling with its votaries of fashion.

Mrs. Campbell and her brother, with their pretty ward, had come up from the Priory, and Evelyn was full of engagements. She had lost something of her old vivacity, and was quieter, and more womanly. Since that memorable day when the *Times* announced the fearful news of Isandula, the Colonel had changed in his

manner towards her; a change which affected and worried her greatly. He was just as thoughtful for her comfort, and attentive to her as ever, but he avoided all arrangements that would leave them *tête-à-tête*. He gave up the German and French readings which she had been wont to pursue in his study, and made all kinds of excuses for not taking her for walks and rides.

Poor Evy was very unhappy about it all; a few months ago she would have asked him boldly, what was wrong between them, but now she could not. Her pride was in arms, too; what did he mean by treating her thus, after making her believe that he cared for her.

Mrs. Carlisle was also in town, and scarcely a day passed that the pretty widow did not meet the Colonel either by accident or design. And he seemed to appreciate her society; and so, much to Evelyn's chagrin, they drifted further apart every hour.

CHAPTER III.

A HEARTRENDING APPEAL.

MEANWHILE the news from the Cape was so far satisfactory. The march to the relief of Colonel Pearson at Ekowe had been accomplished without disaster, and at Ginghilova both Jack Beresford and Raymond had acquitted themselves like thorough-bred young Britons, and without sustaining any injury.

The latter had several times brought himself under the notice of his Colonel, from his intrepidity and valour, and his name had been more than once mentioned in the dispatches home, as that of a very promising young officer.

Helen's heart beat high with love and pride, as she heard the enconiums of praise

lavished on him by mutual friends, and she felt that not for the whole universe could she give up the hope of one day being his wife.

In her last letter to him, she said that Philip had renewed his proposal to her, and that both her father and mother were very anxious that she should accept it, but that she had again firmly declined. More than this she could not bring herself to tell him, the thought of his anguish was too much for her tender heart, she again and again assured him of her constancy and love; and he, poor fellow! looked forward to her letters with feverish anxiety, half-guessing at the persecution at home, from which, ardently as he desired it, he was utterly unable to release her.

On the morning that the six weeks' probation terminated, Lady Shafto called her daughter into her boudoir; which summons Helen, well knowing what she had to expect, obeyed with a sinking heart.

"My dear," began my lady, with much

determination; "do you remember that you are to let Philip know your decision to-day?"

"When he comes I will tell it him; I shall not write to him, mamma."

"And what will you tell him, Helen?" asked my lady, gazing steadily at Nell's rebellious countenance.

"That I will let you know later on; at present I prefer it kept a secret."

"Helen, let us have no more nonsense about this affair," urged my lady, earnestly, "we are in a terrible mess, and it is in your power to get us out of it. As Philip's wife, you will have everything that money can procure; horses, carriages, diamonds, position——"

(Here my lady paused for want of breath.)

"Yes, everything except one essential thing, that is, happiness," returned Helen, bitterly.

Lady Shafto looked at her angrily; she longed to take her by the shoulders and

shake her; how could any woman be so utterly mad and blind, to throw away such advantages; and for what? Simply for a comparatively penniless lieutenant, who was likely at any moment to be shot.

"I wish he would be!" thought she, vindictively.

"Do not say any more now, mother; when Philip calls I will see him."

So the matter was left, and Helen donned her walking attire, and attended by her maid, went round to Lady Redgrave's.

Her ladyship was at home, and welcomed her cordially.

She was, however, grieved to see her looking so ill; she was pale, and the lovely eyes had dark shadows round them, which made them appear larger and sadder. She was a different creature to the bright, animated girl whom Sylvia first remembered.

"Sylvia, I felt I must come to you today. I hope I am not in your way," Helen began, grasping her friend's hand.

"I am delighted to have you, Nell; come

and sit here beside me, and tell me all your troubles; how worried you seem!"

"I am terribly worried. My six weeks of freedom are up to-day, and I do not know what to do. Oh! Sylvia, do advise me, what shall I say to Philip?"

"My dear Nell, what can I advise that will have any effect upon his stony heart. Tell him the truth, that you hate and despise him; he does not think it possible now, but perhaps when he finds how determined you are to keep faith with his cousin, he will accept your decision as final."

"Oh, you do not know the consequences that await us if I again refuse him!"

And in a few words Helen explained to her friend as much as was necessary of her father's hampered position, and Sylvia's heart ached for her, as she recognised how utterly they were in Philip's power.

"Write to Raymond, Nell; you ought not to keep this from him, and then if Philip will not relent, tell him, that until Ray releases you from your engagement you

cannot accept him. That will give you some weeks' respite."

"So it will!" exclaimed Helen, joyfully; "how good of you to think of this! Now good-bye, for I must be off. Mamma does not know I am here, and will be wondering what has become of me."

On reaching home, she found her mother's maid on the look-out for her.

"Oh! Miss Helen, where have you been? my lady has been asking for you, and sent to me quite twenty minutes ago to know where you were."

"What is the matter? Why am I wanted?" asked Helen, coolly.

"Sir Philip Caryl is in the drawing-room."

Every atom of colour faded from Helen's face, leaving her ashy pale, as she replied hastily, "Why on earth could you not say so at once, Ellis? Here, Nursie, take my bonnet," and seizing a hairbrush she smoothed her red-gold locks, and in another minute was entering the drawing-

room, leaving the two maids staring at one another in utter amazement.

"What can possess her?" ejaculated Ellis, "I thought she hated him, and she has flown off as if she liked him. Ah! Mr. Vandeleur was the one; but I'm afraid it will end in her marrying Sir Philip; my lady is a deal too sharp for an innocent lamb like her," which showed that Mrs. Ellis, after the manner of her kind, knew a great deal more of her mistress's affairs than she had any idea of.

Meanwhile Helen, with her heart beating to suffocation, had entered the drawing-room; Philip advanced to meet her, but she merely bowed to him, avoiding his outstretched hand, as Lady Shafto said, impatiently:

"Where have you been, Helen? Philip has come on purpose to see you; it is scarcely polite to keep him waiting so long."

"If Philip has come to see me, I daresay he can afford to wait a few minutes for that

extreme pleasure," replied Helen with a curling lip.

Lady Shafto rose, saying:

"Now you are here I will leave you for a little while. Philip I trust you will remain to luncheon."

"Thanks, it will depend upon Helen," he replied, opening the door for her. He then returned to his chair, and said, earnestly:

"Helen, I have come for your decision. Is to-day to be the happiest in my life or the most wretched? Speak, my dearest, do not keep me in suspense," and his face, full of impassioned pleading, looked into hers.

"Suppose I tell you that nothing will alter my resolution to keep my present engagement."

His brow darkened:

"Then I am equally resolved to carry out my—but why go over the same ground again? you know how I worship you——"

"Do not talk of it," interrupted Helen,

clasping her hands despairingly, "the love you profess is an insult to me!"

"How can you be so cruel! No, I will speak; I have loved you for years; I am wretched without you, it maddens me to think of you belonging to another. Of what use are lands and money to me without you to share them!"

"That will do," said she, with dignity, "and you call this passion, love; I call it selfishness. You do not seek my happiness, but my misery; you cannot love me, when you know that you will bring ruin upon me. Philip, if I go to God's altar with you, I shall commit an awful crime, a horrible perjury; my heart, soul, and life belong to another, the vows I take will be but a bitter mockery, and I shall hate you with the deepest intensity. I will not conceal the truth from you; if you are to pay £13,000 for me, you shall at least know the hollowness of the bargain. Ah! Philip," continued the poor girl, as she seized his hands, and the tears she could no

longer restrain, streamed down her cheeks, "have mercy upon me, be your own generous self, and drive away this demon that possesses you. Remember what old friends my father and Sir Robert Caryl were, and what dear companions we have always been—do not make us dread you as our enemy. Philip, I implore you to relent. My father will pay the sum if you will give him time; I promise you he shall," and then Helen threw herself on her knees to him and her slight form shook with convulsive sobs.

Philip walked to the window and looked out; after a minute or two he returned, gazing with angry yet admiring eyes at the heart-broken girl, who, with her face buried in the sofa cushions was weeping bitterly.

"Listen to me, Helen; I am sorry you think me such a hard-hearted wretch; if I were not certain that I can make you happy I should not be so persistent. I was ousted from my rightful position at Monks-

Hollow by my cousin, I was constantly made aware that Sir Robert considered my father a blackguard, and my mother beneath his notice; I was subservient in everything to Raymond Vandeleur" (here Helen shivered); "all my life I have been treated as an inferior, now my turn has come, the tables are turned. I have already assured you of my love for you, and I cannot give you up."

Helen's tears were dried now. She rose from her kneeling position, and approached the door, saying, haughtily:

"I have not accepted you yet, perhaps I never may;" and then, unable to trust herself to another word, she swept from the room.

With a hasty and forcible expletive Philip took his hat and left the house.

She had proved more determined than he cared to contemplate; but, like all obstinate natures, the more *difficile* she became, the more ardent was he; he had set his heart upon winning her, and win her

he would, no matter what might be the consequences. Leaving the Square he met Sir Jasper Redgrave, who was on his way to the club and seemed rather pleased at the *rencontre.*

The two men had taken a fancy to each other; perhaps there was a dark chord in their natures which vibrated sympathetically.

Both he and his wife were now launched upon the tide of fashion and gaiety.

Sylvia was considered a beauty, and fêted accordingly. Major Carew was also in town, and scarcely a day passed without their meeting at some scene of pleasure and amusement. Being in the same set it would have been well-nigh impossible to have avoided one another. But I am afraid that was the last thing that occurred to them.

Sylvia felt perfectly secure in the fact that he cared for her only as an old friend, that his attentions to her were dictated by a purely friendly spirit; and he knew that

his only happiness was in her, her presence made him glad as it had done so many years ago, when they had been all in all to each other among the orange groves of Malta. Sir Jasper left her pretty much to her own devices. Sometimes a whole day would pass without her seeing him; what he did, where he went, she did not dare enquire, though it struck her as strange that he should never accompany her to the various balls and entertainments. An occasional dinner was the only place at which they were seen together, and though Sylvia might have had the good offices of twenty cavaliers who were only too anxious to be of service to her, she was too pure-minded, too refined—her rivals declared too cold-hearted—to give rise to the least suspicion of scandal.

But in direct opposition to Sir Jasper's neglect was Major Carew's unvarying attention. In the thousand little acts and ways by which a man can show a woman she is dear to him; by the gifts of books

and flowers and music, and above all, and which most appealed to Sylvia's heart, by his kindness to her boy. Scarcely a week passed without his bringing toys and bonbons for the child, who simply adored him, and looked forward to his visits with the wildest delight.

How could she help contrasting her life with "what might have been" had she kept faith with her lover.

Horses, carriages, and dresses from Elise and Worth, diamonds and opera boxes, make hundreds of women supremely happy, but they could not make Sylvia Redgrave so.

She was sensitive and tender-hearted to a fault, and was constantly wounded to the quick by the ill-natured remarks of her husband, who took a delight in sneering at her in company, and railing against her and marriage generally to his friends of either sex.

Most of the men who witnessed his behaviour to his wife were fired with a

unanimous desire to kick him, but with one or two exceptions, the women thought him a most generous, good-tempered, misunderstood fellow.

But then he certainly had such a charming way of ingratiating himself with them.

"Ill words break no bones," is an old proverb, but oh! to some natures, what blows could ever cause bitterer anguish than the insult conveyed by an envenomed tongue.

To a proud, high-minded woman, the system of constant fault-finding is galling to a degree. After half-a-dozen years of marriage, Sylvia, who had had a sincere desire to please her husband, found that it was all the same whether she tried to do so or not. After many struggles with her self-love and her pride, she lapsed into indifference. Still there were times when her whole being revolted against his injustice.

He made her suffer so acutely; generally

she turned an apparently deaf ear to his taunts, but occasionally she retorted, and then he told her that she had an infernal temper, and cursed the day when he had married her !

Still, it must not be supposed that he was always surly and disagreeable, he could be pleasant and good-tempered enough when he chose, but he was so uncertain in his moods, so capricious and exacting, that he would have tried a woman with the temperament of an angel.

All the love and tenderness of her nature was lavished upon her boy, whom she could scarcely bear out of her sight, and who adored his mother, and tyrannized over her to an alarming extent.

CHAPTER IV.

EVELYN HAS A FIT OF JEALOUSY.

MISS CARISFORD cantered down the Row, one sunny morning in June, looking anything but pleasant. There was a decided frown on her smooth brow, and the corners of her pretty mouth were considerably depressed.

Only an hour ago she had begged her guardian to take her to Richmond Park, for a gallop on the turf.

He was in the habit of riding with her in the Row three or four times a week, but they were seldom alone, being generally accompanied by Mrs. Carlisle, and sometimes by Lady Redgrave, or Helen Shafto.

On this particular morning, however, Evelyn fancied a *tête-à-tête* with the Colonel, and with something of her old bewitching

manner, told him she had set her heart on his taking her to Richmond.

To her intense mortification he replied that he had an important engagement, and could not ride at all.

"I suppose you have no objection to my riding alone?" she enquired rather shortly.

"I have a decided objection to it; why not put off going till this afternoon, when I can accompany you. I am really very sorry, Evelyn, but I cannot very well throw up this engagement."

"Can you not postpone it?" she asked, feeling rather cross; it was so seldom that she begged a favour of him, and now to be refused was very hard, she thought.

"No, I cannot, my dear."

So Miss Carisford walked haughtily out of the room, and ordered her horse to be at the door at twelve o'clock, caring little whether the Colonel would like it or not.

As she cantered down the Row, followed at a respectful distance by her groom, she

was joined by Edward Beresford, who looked unfeignedly pleased to see her.

"Good-morning," said she; "I am so glad to have met you, for I am really feeling quite nervous at being alone; you know I never ride without an escort, but this morning Guardy had an appointment, so could not accompany me."

"All the better," replied Ted, "otherwise I could not offer my services as a chaperon."

"I accept them most gratefully," laughed Evelyn, as she reined up her horse at the end of the Row, and they walked slowly back under the trees.

The Park was filling with fashionable dames in gay and varied apparel, attended by their cavaliers; the professional beauties were in full force, and the ubiquitous chair-holders reaped a rich harvest in pennies.

Miss Carisford was warmly greeted by a great number of acquaintances, several of whom looked very jealously at Ted Beresford, and envied him his post of chaperon,

for the heiress was a great favourite apart from her golden charms.

"My mother has written to you this morning," said Ted, "to ask you to dine with us this evening, and go to the Opera; we have a box at Covent Garden."

"How delightful! I will certainly come; fortunately, I am not engaged."

"That is settled then," returned Ted. "But see! there is Colonel Vyvyan!"

"Where?" asked Evelyn, turning hot and cold; what could he be doing in the Row?

"There, under the trees, with Mrs. Carlisle."

"Ah!" exclaimed Evelyn, setting her small, white teeth.

Yes, sure enough, there was the Colonel comfortably seated next to the lovely widow, who looked prettier than ever this morning, clad in some silken raiment of black and gold.

"The Colonel seems rather *épris* in that quarter, Miss Carisford," remarked

Ted. She is very pretty; what do you think?"

"I think she is pretty, certainly," replied Evelyn, feeling too angry to praise her rival; "she always reminds me of a soft white cat continually purring, but who, nevertheless, has claws, and sharp ones too."

Ted laughed heartily, and looked at his companion's vexed little countenance with an amused twinkle in his honest blue eyes.

Just then Mrs. Carlisle caught sight of them, and bowed.

Evelyn returned it with the shortest possible nod; but the fair widow, who had an immense liking for all good-looking men, and especially for Ted Beresford, left her seat and approached the rails, with the evident intention of speaking to them, followed by her companion, who felt decidedly annoyed, and also rather uncomfortable, at the sight of his ward.

So there was nothing for it but to pull up, much to Miss Carisford's disgust.

"I am glad you did not give up your

engagement, to ride with me, Colonel," she said, in an undertone, as Mrs. Carlisle, with the prettiest air in the world, patted the neck of Mr. Beresford's horse with her little daintily-gloved hand.

His cheek flushed, her formal address cut him to the quick, besides his appearance in the Row was awkward, to say the least of it.

"My meeting Mrs. Carlisle was quite unintentional, Evelyn, though I cannot explain it here."

"There is no occasion for any explanation, thanks," returned she, haughtily; her brown eyes giving one flash, as she caught his reproachful glance.

"Evelyn," interrupted Mrs. Carlisle, in her most innocent manner, "this dear Colonel has taken a box for to-night at Covent Garden. I want you to come and dine with me first, and we can all go on together afterwards."

"Thank you, Mrs. Carlisle, I am sorry I cannot, as I have an engagement," returned Miss Carisford, curtly.

The Colonel's face fell, as without a look at him, and a cool bow to the widow, Evelyn gathered up her reins and rode off.

Mrs. Carlisle bit her lip, and then smiled, as she thought, "Silly child! she has no idea of concealing her jealousy. She shall pay for this." Then aloud she said, softly: "What a pity she did not fall in love with the elder instead of the younger son."

The Colonel winced.

"Do you really think she cares for him?"

"I fear there is no doubt of it," she replied, casting down her eyes, and playing with the lace on her parasol.

"Have you not noticed that lately she has become rather capricious and a little quick-tempered?"

"I have, and could not understand it. I am sorry you have remarked it," replied the Colonel, feeling he was committing high treason in allowing a shadow of a fault in his ward.

"Dear Evy! She is so sweet," continued the widow, "that I fear it must be the

worry caused by this affair. She must be so very anxious about Jack Beresford," with a shrewd glance at the Colonel to see how he took this piece of information.

"Thank heaven you are not out there."

The Colonel laughed, and having a decided *penchant* for his pretty companion, looked most eloquently into her eyes with his dark grey ones, as he replied:

"I most heartily endorse that sentiment, Nora; there is not much glory in being potted by blacks."

"You will dine with me to-night before the opera?" she asked, a becoming little blush suffusing her cheek; "I suppose I must take Mrs. Harcourt with me to play propriety," with another side-glance at the Colonel, which was, however, lost upon him, for he was watching for a certain shapely little figure in a dark-brown habit on a bright bay.

"Yes, bring her as my sister cannot come, and I will get Gordon to join us there—he rather admires her."

Shortly after they sauntered towards Hyde Park Corner, where Mrs. Carlisle's victoria awaited her, and having taken his leave the Colonel walked on to the club to luncheon.

It was late in the afternoon when he entered the drawing-room of Mrs. Campbell's pretty little house in Mayfair, and found Evelyn alone, reading.

She merely looked up as he came in, then went on with her book.

"Why could you not go to the opera this evening, Evelyn?" he asked, approaching her.

"I am going to dine at the Beresfords," she replied, shortly.

"Does your aunt know it?" he continued.

"I am not in the habit of making engagements without first consulting her," said Miss Carisford, with some asperity.

"I beg your pardon," returned he, with a keen flash of his grey eyes.

"Pray excuse my seeming interference," he went on, with some hauteur, "but I

should prefer you not riding alone again, especially in the Park."

"I asked you to accompany me and you would not," replied Miss Carisford, coolly.

"Evelyn, it was impossible," said he, exasperated at her tone; "I had better tell you how it was; I had to meet Gordon at the club on business connected with some railway shares in which we are both interested; on arriving there I found a note postponing our interview until this afternoon. Thinking you were disappointed about the ride, and hearing you say yesterday you should like to see 'Carmen,' I walked to Bond Street and took a box for the Opera on my way to the Park; coming out of the ticket office I met Mrs. Carlisle, who asked me to accompany her to the Row.

"Perhaps you may now believe that my refusal to ride with you this morning was entirely on account of business. At the same time, Miss Carisford, I do not think

that I am always bound to explain my movements to you."

Evelyn's cheek flushed angrily, as she replied:

"I am deeply sorry that I asked you to ride at all; rest assured that henceforth I shall never interfere with your arrangements," and with head erect and unmistakable anger shining from her soft brown eyes, Miss Carisford swept from the room, leaving her guardian too annoyed to seek to detain her.

As the door closed rather sharply behind her, I am sorry to say he made use of a very short but naughty word commencing with D, and paced the room angrily for some minutes, biting the long ends of his black moustache.

Here then was a pretty quarrel, and yet a softened look, one kind word from Evelyn, would have broken down the barriers which pride and jealousy had raised between them; but at present they were very far apart. Colonel Vyvyan had never thought

his ward so unlovely, so ill-disposed, and the excuse that Mrs. Carlisle had so subtly suggested, that she was worried about Jack Beresford, only added fuel to the fire of his wrath.

Mrs. Carlisle was supremely lovely that night, in pearl-grey satin and black lace, with damask roses in her bosom, and a large bouquet of the same in her hand, as she and her companion, Mrs. Harcourt, accompanied by Colonel Vyvyan, took their seats in the box at Covent Garden.

The latter could not but admire her, though his heart was heavy; do what he would, his thoughts wandered back to the afternoon, and the remembrance that he and Evelyn had actually quarrelled for the first time in their lives quite spoiled his pleasure.

Just before the curtain rose, to his astonishment he saw Mrs. Beresford enter the box opposite theirs, with her son, a friend of his, and his ward, who looked as piquante and bewitching as if no Colonel had ever disturbed her peace of mind.

When the two inmates of the boxes exchanged greetings, she naughtily pretended to be gazing at something very particular in the stalls, and for the next hour the Colonel had the extreme pleasure of seeing her carry on a pretty strong flirtation with Dick Darrell, a good-looking young fellow in the F.O.

Perhaps the sight of the widow's fair rose-crowned head drooping so often behind the shade of the curtains towards her cavalier had something to do with it; but of course this was unknown to him.

At the end of the first act, Ted Beresford and Mr. Darrell vacated their seats, and the ladies were left alone; and two or three men entering to pay their devoirs to Mrs. Carlisle, Colonel Vyvyan slipped away.

In another minute Evelyn heard the door open, and her guardian entered. Mrs. Beresford welcomed him warmly, his ward accorded him a cool little nod.

However, nothing daunted he seated him-

self by Mrs. Beresford and talked away to the old lady until Ted returned, when he crossed over to Evelyn and whispered gently:

"Will you forgive me, Evy?"

"There is nothing to forgive," she replied, coldly.

"Well, at all events," returned he, rather annoyed at having his *amende honorable* rejected, "do not be angry with me; your coldness cuts me to the heart."

Another second and Evelyn would have laid down her arms and surrendered, but, unfortunately, just then Mrs. Carlisle smiled across at the Colonel and waved her black and gold fan to and fro rather meaningly, which had the effect of making Miss Carisford remark, with chilling politeness:

"Do not let me detain you, Colonel, I see Mrs. Carlisle is signalling for you."

The Colonel, angry with himself for troubling about his ward, made his adieux to Mrs. Beresford, and left the box, inwardly

anathematizing womankind in general, and Evelyn in particular.

The click of the door fell upon Evelyn's ear like the crack of doom. She felt that he was lost to her now, that she had throw him into her rival's arms, and as the curtain rose on the third act her eyes were so dim with tears that everything looked confused and blurred.

And so these two, with hearts aching for one another, drifted farther and farther apart, a state of things which gave infinite satisfaction to Mrs. Carlisle.

CHAPTER V.

LADY REDGRAVE'S STORY.

"NO; I can hold out no longer, I must give in; there is no help for it!" and Helen Shafto rose from her chair, and paced the room with quick impatient steps.

It is a hot morning in June, but Lady Redgrave's boudoir is delightfully cool. The soft air that comes gently in through the silken blinds is laden with the scent of the mignonette and heliotrope in the bank of flowers, which adorns the balcony.

"After all, I shall at least bring happiness to my father. Sylvia, do you know that we had a terrible scene last night; Philip had evidently written to him again, and after dinner, mamma burst into tears, and begged me to pause before I brought ruin upon them both. And then papa

took both my hands in his and said, that if I did not accept Philip I should most bitterly repent it. His look and tone were so strange and wild, I felt quite frightened."

"What did you reply?" asked Sylvia.

"That I could not. And then papa pushed me away, told me I was a wicked, unnatural girl, that I was a curse to them instead of a blessing, and oh! a great deal more which I cannot bear to think of," and here poor Helen broke down, and gazed fixedly out of the window to conceal the tears which filled her eyes.

Sylvia made no remark; what could she say? Her heart ached for her friend, and she was powerless to help her.

"Sylvia, will you be very angry if I ask you something?" and Helen seated herself on the low stool by Lady Redgrave's couch.

"Of course not, what is it?"

"How did you come to marry Sir Jasper?"

Sylvia's cheek turned paler, as she

skimmed over the pages of a book she was reading, with trembling fingers.

"Dear, you must think me so impertinent," continued Helen, hurriedly; "pray, forget what I said."

"No, I will tell you; perhaps it is as well that you should know.

"I was an only child brought up in the greatest luxury; my father was the Colonel of the —— Lancers, and while at Malta, I became engaged to—to—" (here her voice faltered for an instant)—"George Carew, who was in the same regiment. My parents were very averse to the match, notwithstanding their affection for me, as George was but poorly off, and they thought that I ought to do much better, and especially as at that time Sir Jasper was paying me a great deal of attention, and there was every prospect of his proposing to me. However, George and I loved one another, and being rather a spirited child, I determined to have my own way, so gave Sir Jasper his *congé*,

when he ventured to make love to me, and for some months we were thoroughly and entirely happy.

"Ah me! those were halcyon days," sighed Sylvia, pensively, her thoughts busy with the past.

After a moment's pause, she continued:

"Unfortunately such supreme bliss as we enjoyed then is not destined for us poor mortals in this world, and the first blow that fell upon our love was the sudden death of my dear father, caused by sun-stroke; and from affluence we were plunged into the deepest poverty. How his money had gone no one knew, but there was scarcely anything left for my mother and I to exist on. Then Sir Jasper came forward in the kindest manner, and begged me to become his wife, but I could not; my whole life seemed bound up in George Carew. My mother's health then began to fail, she had never been a strong woman, and my father's death, and the reverses of fortune drove her into a decline. A week

before she died, she called me to her, and begged me, for her sake to give up George Carew, and accept Sir Jasper. I knew she was dying, and what could I do! God forgive me! I wrote the truth to my lover, told him never to seek me again, as I intended to become Lady Redgrave, and a few days later I stood by Sir Jasper's side in the Protestant church at Malta, and we were married. That night my mother died, blessing me for acceding to her wishes, and saying that I had made her very happy in the knowledge that my future was now assured.

"I think I must have gone mad at that time, I know I was ill for weeks, and had it not been for the wife of one the officers in our regiment I should have died. Perhaps it would be better if I had," she said in a low voice, whilst great tears welled up into her dark, dreamy eyes, and fell upon the white hands tightly clasped in her lap.

"Did you never see Mr. Carew again?" asked Helen, softly.

"Yes, I saw him the morning of my marriage. Shall I ever forget that meeting! His tender pleading, his passionate reproaches, they were all thrown away upon me then for I was deaf, deaf as some stake, and numbed with misery and despair. My story is something like your own, Helen; pray God your life may prove a happier one than mine has been!"

Helen stole an arm round her waist and kissed her tenderly:

"Dear I am so sorry that I asked you anything about the past; old memories, especially sad ones, are best left to slumber."

Here she stopped, she could not sympathise openly with Sylvia upon the evident neglect and indifference to which she was daily subject; neither could she bring herself to refer to her present intimacy with her former lover, though she could not but see that there must be danger in it to both; presently, however, she said:

"I wonder Sir Jasper likes Major Carew so much if he knew that you were engaged to him."

"My dear," returned Sylvia, gently, "Sir Jasper does not trouble himself about it; he set his heart upon winning me, having won me he thinks no more of the matter. I very foolishly said something of the kind to him some months since, he chose to sneer very disagreeably at me in return, made some very unpleasant remarks, and immediately invited Major Carew to Beech-hurst. Sir Jasper is peculiar in some things, besides he has every reason to believe that George Carew's love for me has entirely died out."

"Why should he think that?"

"Judging others by himself, I suppose."

Helen looked quickly into her friend's lovely face, and pitied her deeply.

"If I marry Philip Caryl I sincerely hope I shall never see Ray again," she remarked, as she rose to leave.

"I trust you never will," said Sylvia, earnestly.

"Do you think Ray would ever forgive me, Sylvia?"

"Yes, if he knew the circumstances that parted you."

"How shall I ever write to him!—but, there, I have not accepted Philip yet! Will you come and have some tea with me to-morrow afternoon, my lady will be out, and we shall have a nice cosy little chat together. Now, good bye," and then Helen got away.

Sylvia watched her graceful figure down the street until it was out of sight, then she opened her writing case and took out a bundle of old letters, in the middle of which was a photograph. It was old and faded, but Lady Redgrave gazed at it with eyes full of blinding tears—gazed for a few seconds, then put it carefully away, and resumed her book. But she could not read. For the first time since her marriage the veil had been lifted from the past, and

thoroughly unnerved and upset by the bitter memories that she had awakened, she ran upstairs to the nursery, and sought refuge in the innocent prattle and childish laughter of her boy.

"But of all the sad words
Of tongue or pen,
The saddest of these, is
'Might have been.'"

CHAPTER VI.

LADY REDGRAVE HEARS A LITTLE SCANDAL.

"Memories that make the heart a tomb;
Regrets which glide through the spirit's gloom,
And with ghastly whispers tell
That joy, once lost, is pain."

"ARE you going out with me this afternoon, Helen?" enquired Lady Shafto, the next day of her daughter, who was lying back in the arm-chair, with closed eyes.

The thermometer stood at seventy in the shade, and scarcely a breath of air came in at the open windows.

"No, indeed, mother, you must really excuse me to-day. My head aches, and I feel out of sorts, and thoroughly knocked up, and if I am to go to the Opera, and Lady Preston's ball afterwards, I must rest now, or I shall be good for nothing."

"You seem easily tired, Nell," remarked my lady more gently, at which Helen's eyes filled with tears, it was so seldom that she received a kind word now-a-days from her mother.

"It is only the heat. By-the-bye, has papa heard again from Philip?"

My lady's brow lowered:

"He has not; but do not suppose that he will give in because you persist in your refusal. Oh Helen! can nothing make you alter your decision? Your father is nearly out of his mind, he seems so strange, so wild in his manner that he quite terrifies me."

"Wait until we hear again; surely we can do that," returned Helen fretfully. And Lady Shafto with a deep sigh rose to depart.

Helen settled herself more comfortably in her cushions, and shut her eyes, but sleep would not come to her. The last interview with her father haunted her; she had not seen him since, for he had shut

himself up in his own apartments, and absolutely refused to see or speak with his daughter; and this had cut her to the heart. She felt mad, desperate, there was no help for her; her lover was far away, but he would have been equally powerless by her side.

Philip, to whom she had appealed for mercy, had refused it; altogether things looked very black for poor Helen Shafto.

Presently, she heard the postman's ring, then the butler's heavy step along the corridor towards Sir Felix's room.

Unable to sleep, racked with the most painful thoughts, she rose and walked up and down the room, then she remembered some article of jewellery had to be found for the dance that evening, so ran upstairs.

As she passed the door of her father's study, she hesitated—should she go in and ask him if there was any news?

She was almost afraid to knock, he was so bitterly incensed with her.

While she thus hesitated, an indefinable

feeling of terror came over her, why, or how, she never could imagine, but she seized the handle and knocked sharply, saying:

"Let me in, papa, I must speak to you."

There was a moment's pause, then the door partially opened and Sir Felix stood upon the threshold; he was looking ghastly pale, and the hands which held the handle shook like a leaf.

"What is it? what do you want here?" he asked angrily.

"Let me come in, and I will tell you," replied Helen, pushing past him.

"Come in some other time, Helen, I cannot see you now—there! you are disarranging all my papers," and he stooped to pick up a letter which her dress had moved from the table.

Helen felt frightened at the sight of his white, haunted face; he looked terror-stricken; she had acted from an uncontrollable impulse, and her father's agitated

manner and trembling hands increased her nervousness.

"You have had bad news!" she exclaimed, "tell me the worst."

Sir Felix groped his way about, muttering:

"It was here a moment ago."

As he leant over the table, a tiny phial dropped on the floor unperceived by him. Helen, seeing something fall, bent down, and picked it up; as she looked at it an electric flash seemed to pierce her brain.

She slipped the bottle into her pocket, and then sank into a chair; the whole room swam before her fainting gaze.

She seemed to hear her father's voice a long way off, saying, as he handed her a letter:

"Read this, Helen; it is all ruin, but I shall not be here long—no, not long."

Mechanically, she took it, but she could not read it, the characters seemed misty and blurred; all that she saw on the page, burnt in in letters of fire was one word—*suicide!*

With a supreme effort for self-control, she turned to her father, who was watching her with eyes that glared like some wild animal's, and holding out her arms to him, drew the bowed grey head down upon her shoulder, whispering:

"Do not fret, papa, I will save you; only trust me, all shall be well;" and at the sound of these welcome words, the baronet broke down, and, completely unnerved, sobbed like a child.

"God bless you, Nell, my own brave girl! you have saved me from ruin—and worse."

Helen shuddered.

"Do not say another word, papa; now let me put away all these tiresome papers, you will not want them again, and I will go and write to Philip Caryl."

"Yes, yes, child, lose no time, write at once!"

"I will directly," and with another loving embrace she left the room.

She ran upstairs with a firm step, and turned the key in the door.

Then, taking the little phial from her pocket she uncorked it, and a strong odour of bitter almonds was perceptible. Turning white to the lips, filled with a worldless horror, she fell upon her knees, crying with clasped hands:

"Oh! thank God, thank God, I was not too late!"

Rising, she quickly fetched her writing-case, saying:

"I must not hesitate, or my strength may fail," as, faint and sick with terror, she scrawled rather than wrote:

"You have prevailed," on a sheet of note-paper, and hastily addressing it ran down-stairs to despatch it.

Opening the drawing-room door she encountered Lady Redgrave, who had just arrived to tea, and who started up quite alarmed at her white and drawn face.

"What is the matter, Nell? you look as if you had seen a ghost."

"So I have," replied Helen, with an agonised sob, grasping the back of a chair

wiht one hand and pressing the other despairingly to her head.

"Oh! how can I tell you what I have been through with papa! No; you must never ask me; but see, here is my death-warrant written by myself," holding up the letter, "yes, you may read it."

Sylvia's eyes grew dim with sorrow as she perused the one line it contained.

"My poor Nell!" she said, tenderly, taking her slim white hand.

"And now I must write to Ray. O Heaven! how can I?—how can I tell him that I am false to him, that I am about to marry his cousin!"

Here she buried her face in her arms, and a storm of despairing sobs broke from her over-wrought heart.

* * * * * *

"Do not say any more, mamma, I cannot bear it," said Helen, as her mother kissed and congratulated her.

"It is no matter for congratulation, it would be far, far better for me, if you were

looking at me in my coffin," replied Helen, bitterly.

Lady Shafto forbore to make any further remark, being thoroughly satisfied with the state of affairs. She was somewhat astonished at her daughter's sudden surrender, but then she had not been, and never will be, enlightened as to the episode of the blue phial.

* * * * * *

The ball at Lady Preston's was at its height when Lady Shafto and her daughter entered, Helen pale and listless, though charmingly attired in the softest clouds of white tulle and satin.

"How late you are, Miss Shafto," remarked an eager young officer as, with several other men lounging in the doorway, he put in a claim for a waltz; "the evening is half gone."

"Yes; I suppose it is late; we have been to Covent Garden," replied Helen, with a charming smile, which quite altered her face.

She gazed anxiously round the room as she went off on her partner's arm, and her brow cleared as if by magic, and the light came back to her eyes as she noted the absence of Philip Caryl.

She had been so afraid of meeting him to-night.

As she stopped for a minute during the dance, Evelyn Carisford passed her, looking so happy and bewitching, as encircled by Ted Beresford's strong arm she was skilfully piloted through the gay crowd.

"This is Waldteufel's last waltz, Miss Shafto, how do you like it?" asked Helen's partner.

"It is lovely, and decidedly inspiriting; do you know that when I entered the room I had made up my mind not to dance at all, I was tired."

"Good gracious! I am very glad you altered it. I had been watching so anxiously for you, I should have been quite overcome if you had refused me."

Helen laughed, and then felt disgusted

with herself for doing so; how was it possible that she could even smile after all she had suffered that afternoon?

But the strains of the string band, the lights, the flowers, the amusing chit-chat of the young fellow by her side, who was a favourite partner of hers, all continued to raise her drooping spirits; for the time-being she endeavoured to forget her troubles.

Lady Redgrave came up to her later on, radiant in gold-coloured satin and gauze which set her dark beauty off to great advantage.

She was with Colonel Vyvyan, who was intent upon finding her a seat in one of the small, dimly-lighted rooms set apart for flirtations.

"So glad you are here, Nell; I was afraid you were not going to put in an appearance," she remarked, smiling.

"I am trying to enjoy myself to-night; 'eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die,' is my motto for this evening,"

replied Helen, with a hard laugh, which made the Colonel look at her rather curiously, as with a nod to Sylvia she passed along with her partner.

"Anything wrong there?" asked he.

"Yes, I am afraid she intends accepting Philip Caryl."

"You don't say so? What a mistake!"

"She is not to blame, Colonel, I know something of the affair, and she can do nothing else."

"Ah! I was afraid there was a screw loose. Caryl and Lady Shafto are such very good friends, which can only mean one thing. Poor girl! I pity her. Raymond Vandeleur is such a good fellow, and so devoted to her. He will come home covered with glory; do you see how he has been mentioned in the despatches? A man I know in the regiment, tells me that the Colonel thinks very highly of him. It will be a sad blow to him if Miss Shafto marries his cousin."

"It will indeed."

Here Major Carew came up and claimed Lady Redgrave as his partner.

"You look tired," he said, kindly; "I know of a delightful little nook where you can rest instead of dancing,"

"I should certainly prefer it," she replied.

"Come then," said he, leading the way to Lady Preston's boudoir, which overlooked a balcony covered with flowers, and was faintly lighted by a shaded lamp.

Two low chairs invitingly placed in the shade of the curtains screened them from observation.

"Where is Sir Jasper to-night?" asked Carew, unfurling her large feather fan.

"Oh! I do not know. He hates going out with me now, it is hard work to get him to a dinner-party, but balls he utterly refuses;" then turning impulsively towards her companion:

"George, why should I be so neglected? am I so hateful in his sight that he cannot bear to be with me? Ah!" (with a hard

laugh) "I daresay if I were the wife of one of his friends, he would think me a most charming woman."

Major Carew dared not reply; words could not express what he felt upon the subject, and the utterance of these feelings would have seemed an insult to Lady Redgrave; moreover, an honourable man always has a horror of saying anything disparaging about the husband of the woman he really loves.

"I suppose you do not agree with me," she continues, after a pause, looking up at him with reproachful eyes; "doubtless you are thinking he is no worse than most husbands, and that as long as he gives me plenty of money and diamonds, and other luxuries, I ought to consider myself a happy woman."

"Indeed I do not," he replies, gently; "but what can I say to you? I would give my right hand to see you happier with Sir Jasper, but I am utterly powerless to help you."

He stops abruptly, a torrent of mad passionate words rushes to his lips, but with a supreme effort of self-control he forces himself to silence; the remembrance of all she has been to him, and still is, he now acknowledges to himself, almost deprives him of his self-possession.

An insane longing comes over him to once more enfold that lovely, rounded form in his arms, and feel that soft cheek pressed against his own as in the happy days at Malta.

But at this moment, the sound of voices carrying on a low-toned conversation in the balcony within a few paces of them falls upon their ears.

"He's going the pace rather," remarks some one in evidently masculine tones.

"He is always about with Violetta Vane, which is not good taste in a married man especially with such a charming wife as Lady Redgrave."

Sylvia starts as if she has been shot, and lays a hand upon George Carew's arm:

"Did you hear that?" she asks him, in a whisper.

"Come away, I entreat you," he answers, trying to draw her farther into the room.

"I will stay; you can go if you like, but I must hear some more."

"Too bad, certainly;" continued the voice, replying to some remark of his companion, which had been lost upon Sylvia, "but I daresay it will not last very long; Violetta changes her lovers as soon as a richer one appears, and, judging by the quantity of new rings, necklaces, etc., she has come out in lately, I should say Sir Jasper's banking account ——"

"Hush! do be careful, suppose some one should hear you," interrupted a softer voice.

"I must insist upon you coming away, Sylvia," says George Carew, feeling utterly ashamed and miserable, as he takes her arm, and forcibly draws her towards the door.

There she stops for an instant, and looks

up at his pained face with wild, beseeching eyes.

"Is this true?—tell me for God's sake!"

"I do not know; I do not believe it; indeed, it is only scandal," earnestly.

"Will you find out, and let me know to-morrow?"

"Do not ask me, Sylvia, I cannot."

"Then you are no friend to me; George, I pray you to do this for me."

"Why not ask your husband yourself, it would be much better."

"Do not speak of him as my husband," she exclaims, with a shudder of disgust, turning away to the door, where she is met by Colonel Vyvyan, who claims her for the next dance.

Left to himself, Major Carew returns to his seat, wholly perplexed, and finds to his annoyance that the couple outside are still there, and with an impatient exclamation, he is about to retire, when Lady Redgrave's name arrests him.

"She is very handsome certainly, and

supposed to be awfully proud and cold; but I daresay a certain Major does not think her so," says the feminine voice, with a soft laugh, for which Carew could thankfully strangle her.

He mutters something like a curse between the teeth so fast locked beneath his brown moustache, and feels intensely grateful that Sylvia is no longer there.

"Ah!" returns the masculine voice, "he is an old love I am told, which makes him dangerous. "There's safety in numbers" is an old proverb, and I think a true one."

George waited for no more, but strode out of the room, anathematizing all mankind, especially "society" in general, and the female sex in particular.

But Lady Preston's boudoir had a deal of mischief to answer for that evening, and Lady Redgrave and Major Carew were not the only persons destined to hear more than they were intended to do.

After Carew had left, it was tenanted by Evelyn and Ted Beresford, who had danced

together several times, not unnoticed by Colonel Vyvyan, who, in spite of Mrs. Carlisle's charms, heightened by one of Worth's inspirations in ball-dresses, and dazzling opals and diamonds, was feeling inexpressibly wretched and bored. Miss Carisford had declined to give him a dance, and the refusal had wounded him terribly. He was also rather put out with Mrs. Carlisle.

That lady was getting somewhat impatient of his dilatory wooing. She saw, with great satisfaction, that he and his ward had drifted farther and farther apart, but this state of things had not made him any warmer towards herself.

She had led him on to a certain point, but beyond that he would not go, in spite of all her smiles and encouragement.

She began to think that, after all, the game was scarcely worth the trouble, especially as a new admirer with a title had appeared upon the scene.

Only this evening she and the Colonel

had sat together in a cosy nook in the conservatory, and she had given him a lead to a proposal several times, but all in vain.

In fact, he had felt singularly relieved when Lord Raybourne found them out, and carried her off to the ball-room.

He remained lost in thought in the same seat, much to the chagrin of some spooney couples, who were, and looked, utterly disgusted at his selfishness in appropriating such a charming little retreat to himself.

Presently, he also became aware of a conversation carried on close behind him, and discovered, for the first time, that a heavy velvet curtain concealed another entrance to the boudoir.

He was about to move away when a few words rooted him to the spot, dishonourable though he felt it to be.

"Tell me, Evelyn," said Ted Beresford's manly tones, in which was a strong pleading; "do you refuse me because you love someone else?"

Not for worlds could the Colonel have moved now, he felt as if his very life depended upon that answer.

"You have no right to ask me that," returned Evelyn, with something like a sob.

"It will make me less wretched to know, I would rather hear the truth. Tell me, for pity's sake, is it so?"

"Yes," in a low tone, "there is someone else."

The Colonel's heart sank, and, with a heavy sigh, he turned, and quitting the conservatory, took up his position at the door of the ball-room, until he saw his ward re-enter, looking rather pale, and unmistakably agitated.

Then he approached her, and said:

"Evelyn, will you let me have a dance now."

She glanced up at him rather defiantly, and was about to refuse, but something in his face stopped her, and she replied:

"You can have the next, if you like, but I am engaged for it."

"Who is the lucky individual? It is getting so late, that we will hope he is gone," returned he, smiling, as he led her off in triumph.

"Have you enjoyed yourself this evening?" he asked, presently, during a pause in the dance, looking down into her charming little face with a complete tempest of love and despair, warring in his breast.

She shook her head rather sadly.

"No, not at all."

"Is it possible;" he returned, somewhat sarcastically; "you have danced with all your favourite partners, and——"

"Bother my favourite partners," exclaimed Miss Beresford, inelegantly, with an upward inclination of her little dark head, "they are a perfect nuisance, sometimes. Guardy," turning to him with something of her old impulsive manner, which made his pulse thrill, "let us go home after this, Auntie is looking thoroughly tired out."

"I suppose I must consider myself very

lucky in being favoured with the last waltz," replied he, putting his arm round her again.

"I would rather dance it with you than anyone here," she returned, with a curious tremble in her voice.

He made no answer, only for a second he held her a trifle closer, though the last word in her speech hurt him.

Yes, that other one that she loved was not here; but for the time being he was happy, for another blissful five minutes he would hold her in his arms, close to his beating heart, with her soft dark curls almost touching his cheek.

Would that it could last for ever.

But alas! the waltz came to an end in a crash of melodious chords, the Colonel descended from the seventh heaven, and proceeded to fetch his sister from amongst the dowagers.

It was early morning when Helen Shafto entered her bedroom. The sky was an opalescent canopy of gold and grey, and

the soft air fanned her hot cheeks and feverish brow with tender touches.

She threw her window wide open, and wrapping herself in a white dressing-gown, seated herself at her davenport, and began to write a letter.

Not once did she falter, sheet after sheet was filled; unhesitatingly her pen travelled over the paper, until after an hour she signed her name, and as she did so, one large tear fell upon the page.

Not daring to read over what she had written, she hastily placed it in an envelope, and addressed and sealed it.

A little later, the early sunbeams peeping into the room fell upon a kneeling form, with hands clasped convulsively above a russet-brown head bowed to the very earth with anguish and despair.

CHAPTER VII.

AN ACCEPTED SUITOR.

"MISS HELEN, it is eleven o'clock, and my lady says please will you get up now, as Mr. Caryl will be here at twelve o'clock."

Such were the first words that fell upon Helen Shafto's ears the morning after the ball, and opening her eyes, she found her maid standing by her side with her usual cup of tea.

"Then he must wait," she answered, impatiently; "I am tired to death, and not at all inclined for anything but sleep. However, I suppose I must do as I am told.

"'Come when you're called, do as you're bid,
Shut the door after you, and you'll never be chid,'"

Quoted she; "Now, Nursie, quick with a

cold bath, and I shall not be long; and bring my black gauze dress."

"Oh! Miss Helen, do not wear that dark costume to-day; let me get you one of those pretty white ones that came home last week," remonstrated the old woman.

"Nursie, if you were going to be sentenced to be hanged by the neck until you were dead, should you wear a white dress or a black one?"

"Lord a mercy! Miss Helen, dear, how can you say such dreadful things," returned Mrs. Gibbons, quitting the room with a horrified face, which almost brought a smile to her young mistress's lips.

"Why have you put on that sombre dress, Helen?" enquired Lady Shafto, an hour later, as she met her coming downstairs.

"It is quite good enough," replied Helen, with a frown.

"My dear, so very black, not a ribbon, nor a bit of colour about it; there are

some scarlet geraniums in my room, let me get them for you."

"No, thank you, I shall do very well. Is Philip here?"

"He has been here about a quarter of an hour, and seems so impatient that I was obliged to come for you. Be a good girl, Nell, will you not?" asked her ladyship, bending to kiss her daughter's pale cheek.

"Oh! yes, of course I shall," exclaimed Helen, submitting to, but not returning, the caress.

In spite of her seeming self-possession, her heart beat violently as she turned the handle of the door, and entered—and very fair she looked in her anxious lover's eyes, in spite of her black dress, which served to enhance the purity of her complexion, and the deep gold of her luxuriant hair.

Philip stepped hastily forward, and took her hands in a strong grasp, saying:

"Helen, those few words I received last night made me the happiest of men. It is true, you will be my wife?"

"I suppose so," she replied coldly, paling under his intense gaze, and then her hands were covered with passionate kisses, and it was with difficulty that she could disengage them.

"Oh! pray do not," she exclaimed, in distressed tones; "you must remember what I told you at our last interview, that though I am ready to be your wife, since circumstances compel me, I have no love to give you."

Philip dropped her hands, and a flush rose to his brow; seeing which she continued, more gently:

"Perhaps in time, I—I—shall not mind so much, but at present I cannot bear it;" here her voice broke, and with eyes dim with blinding tears she turned away and played nervously with the ornaments hanging to her châtelaine.

Philip looked down at her with something like pity stirring in his heart. Presently he said:

"I have brought you some flowers,"

quietly handing her a superb bouquet of hot-house blossoms. She took it with a murmured "Thank you," and felt grateful to him for not noticing her emotion.

"They are indeed lovely," she remarked, burying her face in the fragrant flowers; and then her mother entered.

"Here is something else for you," and Philip drew a small blue velvet case from his pocket.

"The badge of my slavery," she thought, as opening it her eyes fell upon a splendid ring of opals and diamonds.

A bitter smile quivered over her face as she remarked, quietly:

"You could not have brought me anything more appropriate."

"I am glad you like it," he said, as he placed it on her finger, and then, stooping, gravely imprinted a kiss upon her brow.

With a muttered excuse she turned, and hastily quitted the room, unable to restrain her tears, and as she closed the door, Philip said to Lady Shafto:

"Is there any meaning attached to opals?"

Lady Shafto, who had not heard her daughter's remark as to the appropriateness of the gift, replied:

"They are called the stones of misfortune, but it is an old woman's saying, and of course great nonsense."

Philip shrugged his shoulders with a smothered oath, which, however, fortunately escaped my lady's ears.

A little later, Helen being still absent, my lady went upstairs and knocked at her door.

"Helen," she cried, "what are you doing? Philip will stay to luncheon, do pray come down."

After a moment's pause the door opened, and her daughter stood on the threshold, presenting anything but a happy appearance, with her hair disordered, and her eyes red with tears.

"Really this is perfectly childish," exclaimed my lady, impatiently.

"I cannot help it, I hate him! How dare he kiss me!"

"Where is your ring?" asked Lady Shafto, with a horrified expression of face, as she perceives her daughter's hand unadorned by the glittering circlet.

"Hateful thing! I daresay it is somewhere about," replied Helen, contemptuously.

"Are you mad?" asked my lady, severely.

"No, not at present, but there is no knowing what may happen eventually," returned Miss Shafto, groping ignominiously under the sofa, and producing the ring in question.

"There, mother, do not worry about me, I will come down directly; only please tell him that I cannot stand any more of that sort of thing you know what I mean"—(blushing)—"it only makes me hate him worse than ever."

"I cannot very well tell him that."

"No, of course not: not that I should mind if you did, but you can give him a hint."

"Really you are too ridiculous," said my lady, as she quitted the room; "however, I will do what I can."

Whether she obeyed her daughter's behest or not I cannot say, but henceforth Helen was not troubled by any attempts on Philip's part to avail himself of a lover's privileges.

CHAPTER VIII.

MISS VANE.

"Be thou chaste as ice, and pure as snow,
Thou shalt not escape calumny."

MEANWHILE a terrible struggle was going on in George Carew's mind.

As he walked home from Lady Preston's ball in the early morning, vividly his thoughts recalled all the events of the past three months, and his heart seemed torn with conflicting emotions, in which intense pity for Sylvia's isolated position almost out-balanced the deep regard which had always possessed him for her.

When he reached his rooms, he lighted a fresh cigar, and throwing himself into his arm-chair near the open window, gave himself up to profound meditation.

The morning sun streaming into the room

found him still sitting there, but with a stern resolve in his mind.

No longer could he shut his eyes to the dangerous path he was treading. The thought that society had noticed his attentions to her, had dared to speak slightingly of her, maddened him.

He loved her as truly, as purely, as in the days of old: no unworthy feeling had place in his breast with regard to her, and to ensure her happiness he would willingly have made any sacrifice.

But he also knew that their pleasant friendship must come to an end, his only safety lay in flight. To stand passively by, and witness the suffering caused by her husband's cruelty and neglect, was impossible. No matter what it cost him he must go away; and yet how hard it would be to leave her, just now too when she seemed to require his counsel, his advice: though what advice could he give her upon such a subject as Sir Jasper's conduct.

"There can be no such thing as platonic

affection between us; after my love for her at Malta, I must have been mad to trust myself again in her sweet presence," he thought, as he arose and paced the room with impatient strides.

"What will she think, I wonder, when I tell her I am going abroad again?—will she think me an unfeeling brute, or will she not care? God grant she may not!"

And yet in the depths of his heart he knew that she still loved him, he could read her secret in the liquid dark eyes, in the varying colour that played upon her cheek, in the tremble of her hand when it met his.

He had been skating on very thin ice, but there was yet time to turn back.

He dared not contemplate what his life would be without her friendship; the thought of the dreary blank of days and weeks spent away from her made him shudder.

But there must be no hesitation now, the

path of duty spread out plainly before his eyes, and that only must he tread!

* * * * * *

Some hours later he sauntered into the park, which was already crowded with riders and loungers, and where he was greeted by many acquaintances.

As he stood chatting to a knot of men, Lady Redgrave, driving her chestnut cobs, passed them and then pulled up at the rails.

With his new resolve fresh in his mind, he did not instantly advance to meet her as usual, but allowed another to hand her out of her phaeton.

Then he went forward, and was concerned to see how ill she appeared.

"I am going for a little walk," she said, with a wan smile, "my head aches rather, and the air and exercise may do it good."

"You had better sit down," he returned, gently, his heart stirred with tenderest pity at the mute suffering in her dark eyes, "this heat is too trying for you; fortu-

nately the season is nearly over, and then you will be able to rest, and recruit after all your exertions."

She laughed.

"Certainly, society is a thorough treadmill; I am quite longing for a quiet evening entirely alone."

"Are you so fond of solitude?" with a smile.

"No, not as a rule, but sometimes one's thoughts are pleasanter than any company."

"I cannot say I have found mine so," returned the Major, slowly.

"Really?" with an upward glance; "you have nothing to make you unhappy."

"What can you know about it?" said he, smiling again.

"You are a bachelor, you have plenty of money, and heaps of friends; what more can you desire in life?"

"Yes, I am a bachelor against my will, my money has come to me too late to give

me the happiness I craved, and the friendship of my dearest acquaintance I must give up."

She looked up at him quickly, and a flush rose to her cheek, to fade away, leaving her paler than before, as she asked:

"You speak in enigmas; what do you mean?"

"Never mind now, I will tell you another time. There is a vacant chair," going hastily forward to secure it.

Sinking wearily into it, Lady Redgrave found herself next to an intimate friend, a very pretty woman, the wife of Sir Henry Conyers, but voted by discreet matrons as a little fast.

"I have just been writing to you, Sylvia," she said; "I have a box at the 'Royal' to-night, and a little supper at the 'Continental' afterwards, you will come?" Seeing her look rather doubtful, she continued, with an arch laugh, "It is quite correct, my dear, Harry is going."

Lady Redgrave's face flushed and paled in a most unaccountable way, as her friend, turning to Major Carew, said:

"You will join us, I hope; we are so anxious to see Violetta Vane in this new burlesque, they say she is very good in it."

"So I am told," replied he, not daring to look at Sylvia; "but I have a stall there myself, so will look in, if you will allow me, between the acts."

"Yes, pray do, and you can accompany us to the 'Continental?'"

"Thank you, I shall be most happy," replied he, feeling the whole time that this was not carrying out his new resolve to cut himself off from Lady Redgrave's dearly dangerous companionship.

"But, dear me, Sylvia, what is the matter with you this morning?" continued Lady Conyers, looking round at her, "you have not given me an answer yet. Please do not say 'No,' or I shall be in despair."

Lady Redgrave laughed nervously, and replied that she would be charmed to

accompany her; and then Lady Conyers rose to leave, and George Carew took the vacant chair.

"Do you think I am wrong to go the 'Royal' to-night?" Sylvia asked, presently, in a low voice.

"Certainly not, it is a capital burlesque, and will make you laugh," said the Major, purposely misunderstanding her.

"You know what I mean," she returned, in reproachful accents; "after what I heard last night——"

"Pray do not refer to it," he interrupted, quickly, "you only heard what was purely scandal, and should forget it."

"Do you not believe it then?" she asked, eagerly.

"Of course not," returned he, with praiseworthy disregard to the truth.

"I wish I could think as you do," with a bitter laugh.

"Now, I will not have you mention the matter again. I have blamed myself ever since, for allowing you to remain near the

window and hear what was said. The best thing for you to do will be to forget it."

"You could not have forced me to leave the room," she replied, steadily.

"No, I suppose not; I sincerely wish I could have made you," said he, tracing patterns in the gravel with his cane.

Then glancing at his watch:

"It is past two o'clock, see, the Row is quite deserted, you must let me take you to your carriage?"

"Thanks; then we shall meet to-night at the 'Royal?'"

"Certainly, I shall be there," he returned, as she gathered up her reins, and with a friendly nod was carried out of sight by her fiery chestnuts.

The Royal Theatre was a very fashionable lounge this season.

It was fitted and adorned with all the newest improvements in upholstery, whilst the lobby was a perfect marvel in black oak, blue and white china, and old brass-work.

Of this *bijou* domain Violetta Vane was the presiding goddess.

She was a pretty woman, with a good figure, and endowed with an exquisite taste in dress, plenty of repartee, and a decided knowledge of the stage business.

In reality she was no better looking or cleverer than nine-tenths of her contemporaries, but she was the fashion, consequently her dancing and singing were lauded to the skies, her toilettes were copied by the fair sex with a total disregard to the becoming or appropriate, and her smiles were as eagerly sought by the "golden youth" of the day as if she had been a duchess.

Lady Redgrave had not seen her husband since breakfast, so he was quite unaware of her engagement to Lady Conyers, and while she was dressing, he entered, saying, abruptly:

"Are you going out to-night?"

"Yes, with Sir Henry Conyers and his

wife, to the 'Royal,'" she replied, eyeing him steadily.

His face changed a little, and he turned aside and trifled with the ornaments on the mantel-shelf.

"What on earth makes you go there?"

"They had taken a box, and asked me to accompany them. Pray what objection have you?" she returned, coldly.

"Oh! none. But I thought you intended having a quiet evening at home."

"I altered my mind; besides, I am very anxious to see this Miss Vane, everyone is talking about her," she continued, with a quick glance at his annoyed expression.

"I wish to heaven you would consult me about your engagements!" he began, angrily.

"You are going out, what possible difference can it make to you?"

Sir Jasper did not reply at once; presently he said in a milder tone:

"I am dining at the club with Sinclair

and some others, and we also have taken stalls at the 'Royal.'"

"Then we shall meet later on," returned she, with a smile, "surely you do not mind that."

He gave a gesture of impatience:

"It looks most ridiculous for you to be in one part of the house, and I in another," muttered he, tamely.

"Yes, we are usually such a devoted couple, are we not? Never to be seen apart in fact," rejoined his wife, quietly.

He smothered an oath, and stared at her uneasily. It was not often that she was sarcastic.

However, he dared not venture upon further parley, fearing that she might suspect that her presence at the theatre was not very desirable, so with a view to smooth matters, he went up to her, and bending down, touched her cheek with his lips, saying:

"Hope you will have a pleasant evening; I suppose I may come and pay you a visit?"

"It would be as well in the eyes of the world if you did so," she replied, calmly.

He felt anything but comfortable as he quitted the room and ran downstairs, in fear of being late.

He knew full well that Sylvia was too good, too pure-minded to view his peccadilloes with a lenient eye, especially if those said peccadilloes were in any way connected with Miss Vane; and he was troubled with some qualms of conscience as he remembered that lately, if she had but known it, Sylvia had considerable reason for remonstrance.

"Just like my cursed luck! Why in the name of the foul fiend do they want to take her to the 'Royal' to-night? D——tion!"

He contented himself by swearing vigorously at his servant for some trifling omission, then swung himself into his private hansom, and went off to the Carlton Club to dine, in anything but an amiable temper.

And, his wife having completed her toilette, dismissed her maid, impatiently, with Flo,

and wandered aimlessly up and down the apartment.

"Ah!" she cried, with clasped hands, "what shall I do if he is false to me, what will become of me! I have no one to help me in this wide world; no friend to whom I could go for advice, but George Carew, and even he could do nothing for me. Oh! my dear, dear father, why did you die and leave me so alone!" and then, overcome with emotion, she threw herself down on her sofa, and burst into a fit of passionate weeping.

Presently came a summons to dinner, so she had to smooth her ruffled locks, and go down, supremely lovely, in spite of the traces of tears on her pale cheeks, clad in a high cream satin, adorned with numberless frills of fine lace, and relieved by a knot of crimson roses at the throat.

The first piece was over as she took her seat in the box at the "Royal" with Lady Conyers, who was accompanied by Mr. Darrell, that young gentleman being a constant attendant and admirer of hers.

Sir Henry was in the stalls, and stood up and nodded to them as they entered.

The house was rapidly filling, and close to them were Lady Shafto and Helen, attended by Philip Caryl, who looked unmistakably happy and quite handsome.

Lady Redgrave soon discovered that her husband had not yet arrived, but just before the curtain rose, he came in with two other men, and took his seat at some distance from the box, and in such a position that she could not see his face.

The piece was very much the same as most burlesques, full of puns, jokes, and skits upon the popular topics of the day, interspersed with music-hall songs and break-downs, in which of course Miss Vane elicited immense applause, especially from the occupants of the stalls.

Her dresses were exquisite, and her diamonds beyond comparison.

Lady Redgrave watched her narrowly, in fact she scarcely took her eyes off her, and discovered that she glanced very often to-

wards the stalls occupied by Sir Jasper and his friends, which were in the second row, and that most of her smart speeches were addressed to them.

After the curtain fell upon the first act, the box was besieged by numerous acquaintances, and among them came Sir Jasper, who seemed in the highest spirits, and was most amiable and attentive to his wife; asking her if she felt the heat too much, and how she liked the performance, and so on, rather to her astonishment, as he was not wont to be so polite to her in company.

After he had gone she felt happier.

"Surely," she thought, "it could have been only scandal that I heard last night; I will take George Carew's advice, and think no more of it." And when that gentleman came in to pay his respects she looked so much happier and smiled upon him so charmingly that he felt all his good resolutions melting rapidly away like snow before the fire.

"Now for the 'Continental' and supper,"

cried Lady Conyers, as they stood awaiting their carriages ; "Sylvia, are you not very hungry?"

"I am indeed; the theatre is like church in one respect, it generally gives me an appetite."

"You shock me! But how are we to go? As yours is a single brougham you had better let Harry and Major Carew have it, and you come with me, and we will take Mr. Darrell with us."

So after a short delay they drove off to the newly-opened hotel in Waterloo Place, and were ushered into a private room where they were soon seated at an appetising repast.

"What an awful row there is going on in the next room," remarked Sir Harry, as the sound of much laughter came through the half-closed door.

I wonder who is in there," said his wife, regardless of an unmistakable frown on Major Carew's broad brow; "do ask the waiter, Harry."

Upon this an officious functionary volunteered the information that the adjoining apartment was tenanted by Miss Vane, of the Royal Theatre, and a party.

"I would give anything to have a peep at them," said Lady Conyers, laughing; "they seem to be enjoying themselves."

"Are you going to Mrs. Kimberley's garden party, Lady Redgrave?" asked Mr. Darrell, thinking it advisable to change the subject of conversation, as Lady Conyers was such a mad-cap as to be quite capable of putting her head in at the next room, and satisfying herself as to its occupants.

Lady Redgrave, who had suddenly become very grave, replied that she intended going to Richmond.

"Then you had better come with us," said Lady Conyers; "Harry is going to drive his drag, and will take us all," with a coaxing little smile which no man, even a husband, could have resisted.

Sir Harry smiled grimly.

"Carew, you will join our party?" he

said. "No, no excuses if you please," as the Major, after a quick glance at Sylvia, which was not returned, muttered something about a previous engagement.

"That is settled then," said Lady Conyers; "we five, Mrs. Carlisle and Lord Raybourne; we must start at half-past four from our house."

"Let us pray for fine weather," said Mr. Darrell, piously.

"What about dinner?" asked Sir Harry, who always had an eye to the commissariat.

"Oh," replied her little ladyship, laughing heartily, "for once you must go without, it will do you no end of good. Only light refreshments are to be had at Richmond."

"Hang the light refreshments!" retorted her husband, with a growl which made them all laugh. "I am not going without my dinner for all the garden parties ever thought of."

"Come and dine with me at the

said. "No, no excuses if you please," as the Major, after a quick glance at Sylvia, which was not returned, muttered something about a previous engagement.

"That is settled then," said Lady Conyers; "we five, Mrs. Carlisle and Lord Raybourne; we must start at half-past four from our house."

"Let us pray for fine weather," said Mr. Darrell, piously.

"What about dinner?" asked Sir Harry, who always had an eye to the commissariat.

"Oh," replied her little ladyship, laughing heartily, "for once you must go without, it will do you no end of good. Only light refreshments are to be had at Richmond."

"Hang the light refreshments!" retorted her husband, with a growl which made them all laugh. "I am not going without my dinner for all the garden parties ever thought of."

"Come and dine with me at the

'Orleans,'" said Major Carew, "you know it is close by, you might drop me there on our way to Mrs. Kimberley's, and I could order dinner."

This proposal having met with unanimous approval the ladies resumed their cloaks, and prepared to depart.

While waiting for their carriages to draw up, Sylvia laid her hand upon Carew's arm, exclaiming in low tones:

"There is Sir Jasper's hansom! He must be upstairs. Oh, I must know! I have left my handkerchief in the supper-room, I will run up and fetch it," and she was about to turn back when her brougham was announced.

Major Carew immediately offered her his arm, saying in rather a stern voice: "You will do nothing of the kind, Sylvia; surely your husband has every right to sup here. He would be very angry if you were to disturb him. Indeed, I cannot permit you to return to that room, and your handkerchief is here all the time. Come, say good-

night to Lady Conyers, and do not be so foolish."

Sylvia, awed by his manner, obeyed him quietly enough, allowed herself to be put into her carriage without any further demur, and went off, her agitation being entirely unnoticed by her hostess, owing to the extremely animated conversation that little lady was keeping up with Mr. Darrell.

But though Lady Redgrave was not permitted to satisfy her curiosity as to her husband's supper companions, the Major thought there would be no harm in his doing so, and accordingly waited outside the portico of the hotel with a big cigar in his mouth, till Miss Vane made her appearance. And the man who escorted her to her neatly-turned out brougham was Sir Jasper Redgrave.

Feeling sick at heart at this proof of his worst fears, he crossed the road, and took his way homewards.

"What on earth shall I say to her, if she

asks me to-morrow whether I saw her husband?" his thoughts reverting to the sad face of the woman he loved, as he had seen it in the light of the carriage lamps as he bid her good-bye. "I suppose I must tell her another lie. Thank heaven I did not let her go upstairs! what a scene there would have been if they had met!"

Thus he mused, until his honest heart felt wrung with pity for Lady Redgrave. A sudden determination came into his mind once, that he would go away the next day without trusting himself to see her again; then he remembered that perhaps his sudden absence would provoke ill-natured comments, and that by staying he might be of some little use and help to her.

But one thing he resolved, and that was that she should never have the smallest insight into his heart.

"No, my darling," he murmured to himself, as he opened the door of his luxurious

rooms with his latch key; I have placed you upon such a high pedestal, my golden idol, that God forbid I should ever be the cause of your descent!"

CHAPTER IX.

A DINNER AT THE "ORLEANS."

"But he who stems a stream with sand,
And fetters flame with flaxen hand,
Has yet a tender task to prove
By firm resolve to conquer love."

"ARMED for conquest I see, Sylvia," laughed Lady Conyers the next afternoon, as she greeted her in her flower-adorned drawing-room, and turned her round for closer inspection.

"My dear, you look charming; yellow suits you better than any other colour."

"Pray do not," returned Sylvia, smiling and blushing, "you make me quite bashful. But where is Mrs. Carlisle?"

"Oh! she is not coming, so I have invited Harry's particular widow; you know her, Mrs. Brabazon. I thought it such a pity Harry should not have some one to

flirt with, as we are all provided for; besides he is apt to turn sulky if he sees me amusing myself unless he is similarly engaged."

Lady Redgrave laughed, and turned to shake hands with Sir Henry, who just then entered.

"Now then, little woman, time's up. Mrs. Brabazon has just arrived, but I wouldn't let her come upstairs, as the drag is now coming round."

"I daresay," returned his wife, with a nod of her pretty little head; "you expected there would be time for a small flirtation before we started."

Sir Henry revenged himself by pinching her ear until she cried for mercy; after which they descended, and found Major Carew, with Mr. Darrell and Mrs. Brabazon, in the hall.

In a few minutes they were all seated behind the four splendid bays with Lady Conyers on the box-seat, which proud position she would never yield to anyone, and spinning along towards Richmond.

"This is most delightful!" remarked Sylvia, unfurling her large white sun-shade, her spirits rising at the novelty of her surroundings, and at the pleasing prospect of spending the rest of the afternoon and evening in such congenial company. She glanced up once or twice into George Carew's face as he sat beside her seemingly lost in thought, and presently she asked, with a smile:

"What is the matter, George?"

"Oh, nothing; I fear I am very stupid, Lady Redgrave."

She coloured as she heard her name, for last night for the first time he had called her, "Sylvia," a slip of the tongue which he had not intended, and devoutly hoped she had not noticed.

"Do you not care to come to Richmond?"

The Major looked down at her fair face with a pleasant smile curling his good-tempered mouth.

"I think perhaps it would be better for

me if I stayed away, but I cannot resist this invitation, a day in the country, if you can so call it, in this hot weather, is a treat."

She made no reply, but turned to speak to Mr. Darrell.

Presently she said to the Major:

"Did you remain at the 'Continental' after we left?"

"No, I walked home."

"I am afraid you thought me very foolish," she continued, a hot blush dyeing her cheek.

"Do you? At all events I shall not let you talk to me on that subject," he replied, gravely; "I want you to be happy and enjoy yourself to-day, and forget everything that has worried you lately. Will you promise me not to think about it again?"

"Not to-day, at all events," she answered, brightly. And then, much to Carew's relief, the conversation drifted into more ordinary topics, and Sylvia almost forgot her

troubles in the ready jests and repartee of her friends.

She felt and looked perfectly happy, but she was fain to confess to herself, that the drive would not have been so enjoyable but for the presence of her old lover. Would she ever open her eyes to the precipice on whose brink she was standing, or would she only discover its black and terrible depths when the treacherous ground crumbled away beneath her feet?

But she was unconscious of any lurking danger; intent only on gathering the bright and lovely flowers in her path.

On went the bays, tossing their handsome heads, as they felt the encouraging touch of their master's long whip, until the high gates of the avenue leading to Kimberley Lodge appeared in sight, and in a few minutes Sir Henry rounded the gravelled drive and pulled up in first-rate form at the hall-door.

"Very well done, my dear," exclaimed his wife, patting his arm.

"Yes; they've come along well, and have not turned a hair."

Having descended from their exalted position, and laid aside their dust cloaks, the ladies shook out their gay attire, and followed the servant into the grounds, where they were cordially welcomed by Mrs. Kimberley.

There had been some rain in the early morning, and it had heightened the hues of the flowers, and refreshed the trees and grass with its welcome moisture.

The river at the foot of the lawn was dotted with pleasure boats for the benefit of the assembled company, and the tall rushes and flags, stirred by the faint ripples of the water, bent their graceful heads to the kisses of the afternoon sun.

"How lovely it is!" exclaimed Sylvia, as she sank into a rustic seat on the bank. "I have never seen the river look more inviting." She glanced up at the Major as she spoke—was it his presence that added to the charm?

The thought struck her, and she looked away, whilst a few lines she had read somewhere came into her mind,

> Let no one ask me how it came to pass;
> It seems that I am happy, that to me
> A livelier emerald twinkles in the grass,
> A purer sapphire melts into the sea.

Just then some new arrivals attracted her attention, and among them were Lady Shafto, her daughter, and Philip Caryl. Helen came quickly over to her.

"Sylvia, I am so glad to see you again; why, you are quite a stranger; we have not had a chat for ages. There is room for me beside you, is there not?"

Then in an undertone:

"I must get rid of Philip, he quite haunts me."

"Have you had some tea, Lady Shafto?" enquired Major Carew, coming gallantly to the rescue; "Caryl, it is in the tent close to the band," indicating it with his cane.

"I will take care of Helen, Lady Shafto, she will be quite safe here until you return," laughed Lady Redgrave, as Philip,

looking rather put out, offered his arm to his prospective mother-in-law and led her off.

"Major Carew, a thousand thanks," said Helen.

"Now I suppose you want to get rid of me also," he returned. "Well, I will depart, if you are in distress and require me, you will have but to wave your handkerchief frantically in the wind, and I will obey the signal."

And he sauntered off to some little distance, and entered into conversation with a knot of pretty girls preparing for lawn-tennis.

"Well, Helen, I suppose it is quite settled," said Sylvia, looking at her with pitying eyes, and noticing the absence of all brightness and life in her beautiful face, framed in a halo of golden brown curls, and a small close bonnet of Parisian manufacture. Helen heaved a deep sigh of intense weariness.

"Have you written to ——?"

"Hush! Do not speak of it. I have. I dare not think what will be the result of that letter; sometimes when I am alone I try to realize what he will do, and say, when he learns that I am untrue to him."

"No, Nell, not untrue," murmurs Lady Redgrave.

"It is the same thing," impatiently; "and then I feel as if I were going mad. You will let me come to you now and then, Sylvia, will you not, dear? With you I am at peace, at least Philip cannot trouble me with his presence. See, they are returning, we have no time now to say any more about this, but let me come round to you to-morrow morning."

"By all means, Nell, come whenever you like."

As Philip approaches them, Sylvia cannot but note the improvement in his appearance. Happiness has lent a light to his dark eyes, a smile to his well-cut mouth, which is unusual. He looks down at his fair *fiancée*, with proudly-tender possessive-

ness, and asks her to take a stroll with him round the grounds.

"Sylvia, you will come with us," she says, hastily, with such entreaty in her countenance, that Lady Redgrave, albeit she has a horror of being in the way, and knowing full well that Philip wishes her at Nova Scotia, or any other equally distant clime, consents.

But she is not doomed to play the *rôle* of gooseberry for very long, for Major Carew hastens after her, and says:

"Lady Conyers has been enquiring for you, she wants you to see a lawn-tennis match which is just commencing."

"Helen, I am afraid I must leave you, you do not mind I hope, but Lady Conyers wants me."

"I shall see you again before I leave," returns Helen, nodding to her as she walks away with Carew.

"Are you not very much obliged to me for my prompt rescue?" he asks, laughing.

"I am not altogether sure that I feel very grateful," she replies, gravely.

"Really? Did you not think you were *de trop?*"

"No, for Helen begged me to accompany them."

"Do you know the reason why she has accepted Caryl?"

"I do, but I cannot talk of it even to you."

"I suppose you have done all you can to persuade her to keep faith with Vandeleur."

"I have indeed. But there is an insuperable obstacle to her marriage with anyone but Sir Philip Caryl."

"You do not say so! Money, of course, is at the bottom of it; that cursed gold! What misery the want of it entails upon poor humanity!"

"What about the tennis?" asks she, a minute later, as he leads the way to a rose-covered arbour on the river-side, fitted up with a charming little rustic table and lounging chairs.

"We will see it presently; I thought you would prefer to rest for a few minutes, it's so hot in the sun."

"It is deliciously cool in here," replies she, fanning herself gently.

After a pause:

"What are you going to do this autumn?"

Carew's heart beats fast; here is the opportunity of telling her he intends to leave England. And yet as he tries to frame the words his courage fails him.

The golden gleams of the waning sun are shining upon her faultless face with its soft creamy tints, and lighting up the dark star-like eyes which are fixed upon him with something of astonishment stirring in their brown depths.

How can he tell her he must leave her; that it is his duty to tear himself away from her sweet enslaving presence.

With a deep and bitter sigh he turned away and pulled some crimson buds which hung over the door, saying in a husky voice:

"I—I—have not quite made up my mind yet. Sinclair wants me to go out to South America with him to shoot big game, and I am thinking seriously of it."

"You would be away a long time then?" asks Sylvia, in what he knows to be a faint voice.

He gives a quick glance at her, and sees that the pretty rose-flush has died out of her cheeks and that her fair face is quivering with suppressed emotion.

With an effort for calmness he returns:

"I shall probably be away for about a year, perhaps longer, but it is so uncertain."

There is a dead silence, broken at length by Sylvia, who rises from her seat and approaches the door, saying:

"I think we had better go and look for the others." She speaks coldly, though there is a very volcano of sorrow and despair surging in her breast.

Hitherto she has been so blind to her own feelings; now, to her horror, like a lightning flash the truth stands revealed to her.

She knows what he is to her; that dearly, truly, as she has loved him formerly, he is a thousandfold dearer to her now. What her life will be when he is gone she dares not think, she only knows that he is the one love of her heart, and that her secret must be preserved at all costs.

And he, noting her coldness, thinks she is annoyed at the carelessness with which he has spoken, or that perhaps, after all, she does not very much care whether he goes or stays; and so they saunter back to the tennis ground where a very pretty game is being played, and where she is supplied with tea and peaches.

"Sylvia, are you ready to go?" asks Mary Conyers, presently. "The drag will be round almost directly. You look pale, have you a headache?"

"Yes, rather; I almost wish we were not going to the 'Orleans,' but I daresay the drive there will do me good."

"It is such a short one, unfortunately," replies Lady Conyers, smiling.

It is an hour or two later, the guests at the "Orleans" have dined and are now enjoying the sweet fresh air outside. The moonlight falls with silver radiance on the grassy slopes of the lawn, and the dark river rippling musically by sparkles like diamonds where the overhanging branches of the trees fall into the clear water.

A sense of *bien-être* pervades our party, especially the masculine portion of it, as is usual to poor humanity after a good dinner; the sound of laughter and the scent of cigars are wafted on the evening air already laden with the perfume of roses.

"I trust your head is better," remarks a low voice in Sylvia's ear, as she sits listening to Lady Conyers's chatter, and Major Carew stands beside her, tall and upright in the moonlight, which brings out the crisp curls of his brown hair and his well-cut aquiline features to great advantage.

"Oh! it is quite gone, thanks," she returns.

"Where is Harry?" enquires Lady Conyers of young Darrell.

"He is strolling about with Mrs. Brabazon," laughs he; "I met them just now. Would you not like to follow them?"

"I shall be charmed," she replies, with a wicked little smile; "you are sure you know in which direction they are gone?"

"Of course; trust me to find them. But are you sure you are warm enough?" arranging her cloak with praiseworthy care.

In another instant their figures are lost in the gloom of night; Lady Redgrave and the Major are left alone.

A deep silence falls between them, a silence that is eloquent, but embarrassing.

Sylvia has scarcely vouchsafed him a word during dinner; he is informed, curtly, that her head aches, when he enquires tenderly if there is anything amiss, and he feels her coldness deeply; still he thinks it is for the best, and is rather congratulating himself upon having so opportunely broached the subject of his departure; still

he is dissatisfied and out of spirits. He does not guess at her feelings, but he fancies she is angry with him, and he cannot bear that there should be a shadow of bitterness between them.

Seated by her side, he strives to think of something casual to say to her, and commences with the highly original remark:

"What a lovely night!"

"It is indeed! Looking up at this clear, blue, starry sky, one feels so calm, so good; the world and its troubles seem so far away, I could stay here for ever."

She leans her head upraised against the rough wood-work of the seat, gazing with soft eyes at the empurpled vault above, in which the Queen of Night sails in luminous solemnity.

Another pause, then she says, gently:

"Did you mean what you said this afternoon about going away?"

"I did," he replies, curtly, turning aside to flick the ash off his cigar.

Again a pause, during which his heart

beats with loud throbs, and it seems as if a thousand devils were seeking to turn him back from the path he is so resolute to tread.

"Why do you go? I have fancied lately that perhaps all is not well with you," she says, softly.

"I go because I dare not stay here any longer; because there is not only danger for me in London, but it threatens one whom I love far better than myself, and for whom I would willingly make any sacrifice."

He speaks with a deep vibration in his voice, and as he finishes she turns and looks at him with a faint quiver of her red lips, and their eyes meet. Great tears are standing in hers; one falls from her dark eyelashes and rolls slowly down her cheek—and at the sight of it, George Carew loses his head, his good resolves vanish like mist before the sun; and clasping her soft, slim hand in his, he exclaims in passionate accents:

"Good God! Are those tears for me? Sylvia, my life is in your hands. I will go or stay as you desire."

For an instant she sits dumb and motionless, wonder-struck with the rush of intense bewildering joy that fills her soul.

"He still loves her then!"

That is her one thought, whilst he, feeling that his very existence depends upon her answer, gazes at her with impassioned eagerness; the next moment she has withdrawn her hand hastily, saying in a low, choked voice:

"Hush, not another word, I beg of you: here is Sir Harry."

He recovers his self-possession instantly; and a second later Mrs. Brabazon and Sir Harry, sauntering back, find him lighting a fresh cigar.

The drive home passes like a dream to him. His brain seems on fire, his thoughts are in confusion; once he ventures on a

remark to his silent companion, but she makes no reply.

"He glances at her anxiously, and sees that she is sadly pale, and her lips are tightly compressed.

A dread seizes him that he has grievously offended her, but he dares not enquire.

Presently (he cannot bear the suspense longer) he whispers, under cover of a lively sally from Lady Conyers:

"Will you forgive me?"

"I am not angry," she replies, in a low voice.

They are close home now, and as the coach turns into one of the squares, they pass a single brougham, from which a gentleman is in the act of alighting. Lady Redgrave gives a start, it is her husband. Inside, she catches sight of some unmistakably feminine raiment, and as the lady leans forward for a second to look at the coach, she recognises Miss Vane.

She makes no comment, but a sensation

of the extremest loathing and disgust passes over her.

She knows Sir Harry has seen, for he utters something very like an oath, and administers a cut with his whip to one of the leaders; Major Carew gives no sign, his eyes are fixed upon the back of Lady Conyers's bonnet, but his teeth are set hard under his thick moustache, and there is an involuntary movement with his right arm which betokens mischief to someone.

When they pull up a little later, he descends with alacrity, and has the pleasure of assisting Sylvia to alight.

"Carew, I will go on," calls out Sir Harry, raising his hat to her, as Lady Conyers nods "Good-night;" "you can walk round to our house. You must come in and have a cigar with me, Darrell will be there!"

Then the coach drives off amidst a chorus of farewells, and disappears round the corner. Carew has rung the bell, and he and Sylvia are alone upon the door-steps.

"May I come and see you to-morrow?" he asks.

"Yes, I should like you to call, I have something to say to you, you will find me at home after four o'clock."

Then the door opens, he raises his hat, and walks hastily away, fearful of meeting Sir Jasper, whom he does not care to encounter, as he feels his temper would get the better of him.

And she goes straight upstairs to her room, dismisses her maid, tears off her bonnet and cloak, and throws herself upon her knees by Flo's cot, which is drawn up close to her bed. He is fast asleep, with his golden curls shading his pink cheeks, one tiny hand lying like a crumpled rose-leaf upon the blue silk coverlet. Nothing heeds he his mother's heart-broken sobs, he is lost in the innocent slumber of childhood, and knows not the anguish and misery she is suffering.

CHAPTER X.

A BITTER AWAKENING.

THE next afternoon as the clock was striking the hour, Major Carew was ushered into Lady Redgrave's boudoir, where he found her seated by the window, turning over the pages of a novel.

He could not but notice that she seemed ill, with violet shadows beneath her soft eyes; evidently sleep had been a stranger to her during the night.

He came hastily forward and took her hand, gazing at her with infinite compassion and tenderness in his honest face.

He pitied her so intensely, and he was so powerless to help her. Even his attentions to her, his sympathy had harmed her, by provoking the ill-natured comments of scandal-loving society. He, who would

have willingly laid down his life to ensure her happiness, could only stand by and witness her grief, unable to stir a finger in her behalf.

"I am glad you are come," she said, with a wan smile; "will you not sit down?" pointing to a chair near her own.

"You told me yesterday that you thought you should leave town," she began, nervously.

"Do you wish me to go?" he asks, with startling earnestness.

For an instant she raises her sad eyes to his, then she looks away.

He draws his chair a trifle nearer, and says:

"Sylvia, as God is my witness, I would give my right hand to make your life happier with your husband. Why do you not ask him to leave town with you? Get him away from London; he has been drawn into a fast set, but when he learns that you are unhappy about him I feel convinced that he will do as you wish."

Sylvia looks at him again searchingly.

He is pleading against himself; she does not understand his generosity, neither does she realize what a true pure love he has for her, how entirely free it is from selfishness.

She replies, somewhat coldly: "I will speak to him, but I fear that it will be useless."

"I sincerely hope not," he returns, hastily; "surely you will not plead in vain?"

"You are not a husband or you might think differently," she says, bitterly. However, I will speak to him to-morrow. To-night he dines out, to-morrow evening we shall be alone for a wonder."

"Will you let me know the result of the interview?" he asks.

"Of course, I do not think for an instant that he will leave town in the very middle of the season. We have such a number of engagements."

"I shall stay three weeks, and then I am going to have a little yachting," says Carew, speaking rather fast and looking out of the

window. "I met an old brother officer this morning, and he is very anxious for me to go with him in his new yacht."

"How I shall envy you," she replies, with a faint sigh. "I love the sea and am a capital sailor. How long do you think you will be away?"

"Oh! about a month or so," he returns; "he proposes a trip to Norway which will be quite a new line of country for me."

"Then you will not be at Goodwood?" she asks.

"No, I suppose not. Are you going?"

"There is a talk of our taking a house near Chichester with Sir Harry Conyers."

"He said something to me about it," said Carew; "that he hoped I should be one of his guests."

"And you declined?"

"On the contrary, I half accepted."

"Doubtless you will find the yachting more pleasurable."

"You know it will not be so," in a reproachful tone. "If you wish me to go

to Goodwood, and give up the trip to Norway, I will do so. I am entirely at your service."

"You will do as I like, unhesitatingly?"

"I will."

"Then decline Goodwood and accept your friend's invitation," replies Sylvia, steadily. "I have thought so much over everything during the night, and I am sure it will be better that you should go. Do not think me unkind," she says, with a slight tremble in her voice, "I shall miss you terribly, but it is best that we should not meet too often."

A flush rises to his brow; he feels as if she had suddenly plunged a dagger into his heart. But he knows that she is right, and as he rises to take his leave, he holds her hand closely clasped in his, looks into the soft depths of her eyes, and says:

"I will do as you wish. As a reward, will you promise me to think of me always as your truest, most devoted friend?"

"I will indeed. I have the greatest

confidence in your honour and fidelity," she answers, earnestly, with a quiver of her lips, and something like tears standing in her eyes.

All his old chivalrous feeling is roused by her reply, and, with a fervent pressure of the slim white hand lying in his, he turns away, and in another second is gone.

Dinner is over, the dessert is on the table, the men-servants have retired, and Sir Jasper and Lady Redgrave are alone.

She has dressed herself with unusual care to-night, which is not unnoticed by her husband.

He likes to sit opposite a pretty woman, and especially a well-dressed one; and though he is no longer in love with his wife, and delights in worrying and nagging at her whenever it suits him to do so, still he appreciates her beauty, and enjoys seeing her in well-chosen and elegant costumes.

To-night is somewhat chilly, and she

wears a deep crimson satin, high to the throat, with priceless point-lace ruffles, her only ornament a string of oriental pearls clasped tightly round her slim white neck.

The moment they are alone she changes her seat for one at her husband's side, and, whilst pealing a peach, watches him anxiously as he turns over the evening papers.

Presently, she says, timidly:

"I am so tired of town, I do so wish we could go away for a little while. I heard you saying something about taking a trip abroad yesterday. Could we not go now?"

He looks up in astonishment.

"What in the name of fortune makes you think of such a thing in the very middle of the season?"

"July is close here, people will be leaving in a week or so," she replies, her heart beating tumultuously the while.

"Nonsense," he says, shortly; "if you are so sick of town, you had better go

down to Beech-hurst for a few days. Really, there is no pleasing you women, you are never contented."

"Indeed, I am, Jasper; but I should like to go abroad with you."

"Now, there is something more than I can understand in this sudden freak," returns Sir Jasper, with a quick, and searching glance from under his light eye-lashes. "Out with it, I hate this beating about the bush."

Lady Redgrave lays a gentle hand upon his arm:

"Jasper, I am so wretched about—I fear you have got into rather a fast set of people, and I want you to come away with me for a little while."

"You are infinitely considerate," he replies, with a sneer, whilst his face grows pale. "Pray may I enquire who has volunteered you any information on this subject?"

"No one, but I cannot help seeing what you take so few pains to conceal," she

returns, a burning flush overspreading her cheek; then softly, "Let us leave town, we might be so happy together, it will be better for us both—you loved me once, you would love me again perhaps if you were away from the temptations you have here."

"There, that will do! Pray spare me a scene, I am in no mood for it," he says, roughly.

"But I must speak. Do you imagine that I am blind to what is fast becoming an open scandal?" she continues, passionately.

"To what do you refer?" he asks, savagely.

"To your attentions to that woman with whom you were supping at the 'Continental' the other night, when I was there," replies his wife, white as death, and quivering with suppressed emotion.

Sir Jasper draws a deep breath, and with an oath seizes her arm with so ungentle a grasp that a gold bangle she wears almost cuts into the flesh, exclaiming:

"By Heaven! madam, I will brook no interference from you in my affairs. You have plenty of liberty, you do pretty much as you like, and go where you will, and you shall not question my actions. I give you everything that a woman can desire—you have your horses, carriages, dresses; and God knows you make my life miserable with your infernal temper; if I attempt to have the least enjoyment in my own way you treat me to this sort of thing."

"When have I interfered with you?" retorts Sylvia. "Do you ever go anywhere with me, except to an occasional dinner which you cannot with decency evade? Are you ever seen with me at balls, or the theatre, do you ever ride or drive with me? No; you are always either engaged, or tired, or something of the kind. Perhaps I have grown somewhat careless lately, and have not studied you as I should do; but indeed I am very sorry, and I will alter—only I beseech you to take me away for both our sakes—" and she clasps her hands

round his arm and her eyes brim over with tears.

"No, I'll be hanged if I do! I am full of engagements, and if you think I am likely to give them up to go away alone with you, you are very much mistaken. I am sick to death of the sight of you. A nice prospect for me alone at some beastly foreign place—we should quarrel all day."

"Indeed we should not, if only you would be kind to me. Ask whom you please to accompany us, if you prefer it."

"Ah yes!" (with a sneer) "I suppose you would like Carew to be of the party."

Her cheek pales, but she looks her husband straight in the face; he shifts his gaze from her uneasily, and after a pause she says:

"You are mistaken, Major Carew is going to Norway in a friend's yacht."

Sir Jasper brings his fist down on the table with a thump that makes the glasses rattle, and exclaims:

"By G—d! Now I have a key to this sudden freak of yours, my lady."

"What do you mean?" she asks, a look of terror coming into her pale face at his expression.

"Our quondam lover has grown rather tired of making love to his friend's wife," he continues, an evil smile curling his thin lips, "so he resolves to cut it; our friend's wife feeling aggrieved, and thinking her husband has been having rather a good time of it lately, is suddenly, and I will admit naturally, seized with the desire to spoil his pleasure. Upon my word your infernal impudence is most amazing!"

"How dare you speak to me like this!" says Sylvia, turning crimson with shame and indignation; "if you objected to Major Carew, why have you always been so friendly with him? You are continually asking him here."

"One can always afford to be amiable to an unsuccessful rival. It is a pity you do not treat him to a little of your temper. I

wish he stood in my shoes sometimes, though I should pity him, poor devil! I should never have married you if I had known what you were."

"I am sure I wish you had not," she returns, brokenly.

"Perhaps you would like to know my reasons for that most besotted piece of folly on my part," replies Sir Jasper, with a harsh laugh, and a savage glance at his wife, who has sunk into her chair with her face buried in her hands.

"I have always made a point of gaining whatever I have set my heart on; if I had no rival in the field, I should not have been so eager about winning you. The idea of entering the lists with Carew contained no small amount of excitement, and the fact that you treated me with scorn only added a zest to the pursuit."

"Is this true, that you never loved me?" she asks, starting up, deadly white to the lips.

"Oh!" (carelessly) "I loved you well

enough—you were undeniably handsome, and so cursedly cold and proud that I thought you would uphold my dignity as my wife."

"Have I ever done anything to forfeit your regard?"

"You have not; but let me recommend you to be careful. If you are not satisfied with my conduct, doubtless the law may assist you, but remember one thing—I will stand no interference with my actions. Now I am going out; I had an idea that I was to spend a peaceable evening at home, but of course you must treat me to a scene—you drive me out of the house, and then grumble because I am not more with you."

With that, Sir Jasper, who had been engaged the whole day to a card party for that night, got up out of his chair, lit a cigar, and without another look at his unhappy wife quitted the room.

She sits motionless until the sharp shutting of the hall door denotes the departure of her husband; then slowly, wearily, she

goes to her boudoir, where a small wood fire is burning; she sinks down on the white rug before it, and leans her head on the cushions of her arm-chair. She feels dazed, bewildered; until now the thought that her husband had married her from pure love has been the one redeeming feature in his conduct towards her, the one incentive to her wifely duty and submission; now, she knows that it was from a thwarted desire to stand first in her favour, from jealousy of her young lover, and rage at her scornful rejection of himself.

A feeling of utter desolation fills her heart.

"What has she done in her short life," she wonders, "that she should be so cruelly punished? Why should there be one law for men and another for women in this world?"

Alas! how many a poor heart-broken woman has thought the same.

Her husband may spend his time and money when and where he pleases, no

one can gainsay him, no one thinks any the worse of him, at all events no one has the courage to tell him he is a scoundrel, whatever their opinion may be; whilst she may not receive the attentions of so old a friend as George Carew without censure.

Her eyes are opened at last to her danger; she has been trying to deceive herself for so long with the flimsy pretence of friendship, platonic affection; now she is convinced that henceforth she and Carew are best apart.

Her head throbs painfully, her hands are hot and burning, as after a time she goes upstairs to her room.

Thank God she has her child! If it were not for him—— Here she shudders, and falling on her knees beside his cot, buries her face in his pillow, as if for protection from her thoughts; the touch of his soft cheek seems to give her strength. Presently he throws one warm little arm round her neck, and sinks again into deepest slumber.

How long she kneels there she knows not,

but all the bitterness and anger in her heart melt gradually away: she has her child to live for, he loves her; with him she can never be desolate or unhappy.

And as she lies there with her boy pressed close to her aching breast she makes a solemn vow, a vow that is registered in Heaven, and that is kept for her child's sake.

CHAPTER XI.

A DEADLY ENCOUNTER.

"By torch and trumpet fast array'd,
Each horseman drew his battle blade,
And furious every charger neigh'd,
To join the dreadful revelry."

IT is a sunny morning in the middle of July—the mail is in from the Cape, and brings sorrow to many hearts that have been so anxiously awaiting news of their beloved ones.

Helen Shafto is in Miss Carisford's boudoir, an open letter in her hand, tears running down her pale cheeks, whilst Evelyn lies prone with grief, her face hidden amongst the cushions of her couch.

Jack Beresford is dead! He lies stiff and cold beneath the sod in Zululand, whilst his mother weeps in the anguish of her bereaved heart, and Evelyn cries in

sorest distress at the thought that she will see her light-hearted young soldier no more.

Ray has written a hasty account of the poor boy's death to Helen, begging her to inform Evelyn of the sad news, a task which has been accomplished with much sympathy and tenderness, and many tears, for Helen cherishes a great affection for Jack. Has he not been her lover's chosen friend and dearest companion?

Were he as disagreeable and ill-favoured, as he is pleasant and good-looking, this fact alone would be a sufficient passport to Helen's loyal regard.

Ray and he had been sent out with about a dozen of their men on a reconnoitring expedition. They had departed in the highest spirits, only hoping that they might fall in with some of the enemy and have a skirmish.

They had been riding for some little time over a bare plain, bounded on the south by a kind of thicket, capable of concealing

any number of Zulus. Nearing this they halted, but not a sound broke the stillness, not a sign of any living creature was visible.

"How thirsty I am!" exclaimed Jack Beresford, baring his heated brow; "what wouldn't I give for a pint of Bass!"

"Have a pull at my flask, Jack, it's better than nothing," laughed Ray, handing it to him.

Jack was in the act of putting it to his lips, when with a fearful yell there broke from the jungle on the right a crowd of Zulus, who rushed towards them with great rapidity.

To turn their horses' heads towards the camp and ride off was the work of an instant, for the Zulus were so far superior in numbers that Ray dared not risk an encounter, indeed it was against his orders to do so unless absolutely obliged.

Off they rode, followed by their enemies, who kept up an uneven fire, which, fortunately, was at too long a range to do much harm.

At last, however, Jack's horse put his foot in a hole and fell, throwing his rider heavily, and spraining his own shoulder so severely that it was impossible for the poor animal to proceed.

"Never mind, Ray, you go on, save yourselves, do not risk your lives for me. See, they are close on us now," said Jack, hastily extricating himself from the saddle.

"Perish the thought!" cried Raymond; "may I be——if I leave you here to be butchered by these black devils."

So saying, with a strong arm he pulled Jack on to his saddle, and on they went again.

But the Zulus were coming up very fast, and their bullets began to find a mark.

The horse that Ray rode was flagging, the double burden was evidently too much for the poor creature's strength, and after a moment, during which one of the men was shot in the right arm, Ray gave the signal to halt.

"Wilson," he said, hastily, to the

wounded soldier, "you ride as fast as possible for assistance, the camp is not far off, make haste, for the odds are fearfully against us, but whilst we have life we will fight hard to keep it. Now, my men, remember Isandula! We will give them a warm reception! Aim low, and steadily."

And a warm reception it was. Down went half a dozen of the advancing Zulus, another rain of bullets and the same result; but nothing daunted on they came, with cries that would have struck terror into the bravest heart.

There was no time to reload, already the foe was upon them, in their very midst, striking right and left with their assegais.

Fighting like very demons our men stood their ground bravely.

Jack was presently engaged in a hand-to-hand struggle with a huge brute, who towered over him, already he had run his sword through the Zulu's arm, thereby partially disabling him, when a well-directed blow with an assegai pierced his

chest, and he fell forward with a low cry.

Ray saw him go down, and, clenching his teeth, he struck his spurs into his horse causing him to rear suddenly, thus trampling down several of the enemy; then, with his face white as death, a murderous desire for revenge burning in his breast, his sword flashing in the sunlight, and dealing death at every stroke, he cut his way to his friend's prostrate body, where, with one dexterous turn of the wrist, he parried a blow from the assegai of Jack's late assailant, and cleft the head of the Zulu warrior to the teeth.

But now he begins to feel sick and dizzy; something, too, is trickling down his forehead and cheek, obscuring his sight—something which he dashes away with an impatient hand, staining it crimson; still he grasps his sword, he fancies the Zulus are losing heart, he hears a ringing British cheer in the distance, a cheer which completes the defeat of the enemy; the

ground seems to wave like a sea of blood, he reels from his saddle and remembers no more.

When he came to himself some hours later he found he was in hospital, his face and head covered with bandages.

He felt so stupid and giddy that he could not at once recall what had happened.

"Hullo, doctor!" he cried, half-laughing, to the surgeon who came up to him with some refreshment, "what is the matter with me? I had no idea I was wounded. Hope I haven't spoilt my beauty."

"I hope not," returned he, cheerfully. "You've got rather a nasty wound in the head and cheek from an assegai, but if you keep quiet you'll do."

"Any one much hurt?"

"Three killed, some wounded, but they will be all right again in a day or two. Poor Jack Beresford's very bad."

"Good God! I remember now. May I go to him."

"Yes; but you must not excite him, not

let him talk; he cannot live more than a few hours," said the doctor, in a low voice.

Ray covered his face with his hands; he was inexpressibly shocked and grieved. Jack was his best and dearest friend, a favourite alike with officers and men.

Outside the hospital tent he found himself surrounded by several of his brother officers, all eager to shake him by the hand.

"I wish I stood in your shoes, Vandeleur," exclaimed one youngster, "the Colonel has sent to say he wishes to see you at once. You are safe for promotion now, perhaps the V.C."

"Nonsense, young 'un, I only fought for my life, anyone would do the same. We should have run away if we could, we did try, you know."

A few words of praise and congratulation from his Colonel make Ray's cheek glow with pleasure, but he is too grieved at his friend's sad fate to feel much elation.

His heart is too full for words as he follows the doctor to poor Jack's bedside,

and takes the nerveless hand lying on the coverlet.

"I am hard hit, old man, it has been a short life and a merry one."

Jack speaks with difficulty, and Ray, in an agony of fear, implores him to be silent.

"There is no hope for me, doctor, is there?" whispers the poor boy, presently, turning his anxious eyes to the surgeon, who shakes his head sadly, and puts his finger to his lips to enjoin silence.

"Perhaps it is better so," Jack murmurs, "she would not have loved me."

Then he relapses into unconsciousness.

Through the long hours of the night, Ray sits by his side.

His wounds throb and burn painfully, but he scarcely heeds them; he is not alone, for Doctor Milward keeps vigil with him. Towards morning Jack's eyes open, and he whispers:

"Ray, do not let them take away my note-book, let it be buried with me. Give my love to my poor mother, and Ted, and

——" here he falters for an instant, while a faint flush passes over his haggard features——"and Evelyn. God bless you, Ray, dear old boy."

"Do not say any more now, I beg you," returns Ray, with a sob in his throat, "everything shall be done as you desire."

The morning sun is peeping into the tent, and Jack's face looks sadly pale and sunken, as his friend bends over him, and gently wipes away the death-dews that rise thick under the fair curls of his hair. The doctor moistens his lips with some drops of cordial that seem to give him a little strength; he lies back on his hard pillows breathing heavily, whilst they watch him anxiously.

The doctor, who has seen so much death and suffering, is terribly moved at the knowledge that here human skill is powerless, that for this happy, light-hearted, gallant, young fellow, this world, with its follies and miseries, its trials and temptations, is no more.

Presently Jack starts up, he clutches at his throat as if something is choking him, there is a gasping sob, a stream of crimson dyes his pale lips, and he sinks back into Ray's arms—a shiver runs through his strong young limbs, and Jack Beresford's short career is run!

* * * * * *

Only a brief account of this is contained in Ray's letter to Helen, he is too ill and unhappy to write at length; it is not till later that she learns, partly from a letter from the Colonel of his regiment to Mrs. Beresford, partly from the newspapers, how gallantly her lover had borne himself.

But there is an enclosure in Ray's note which is not intended for Miss Carisford's perusal.

Part of it runs thus:

"Why do you never mention Philip? I hear rumours that fill me with vague uneasiness and apprehension. Rumours that he is always with you, that he aspires

to a higher place in your regard, than he would dare to do were I at home. For pity's sake write and tell me that there is no shadow of truth in these tales. I am tortured with fears—your letters are constrained, and unlike what you wrote three months ago. If you are false to me, I shall lose all faith in God and man. But, no! I wrong you by such doubt: forgive me, my love, for I truly believe in your constancy."

No one but herself is aware of what Helen suffers as she reads these few lines. The thought that by this time he must know all, fills her with terror. She dares not picture to herself his grief when he learns that she is the betrothed of his cousin.

"Ah, Heaven!" she cries, "it would have been better for him to have died as poor Jack Beresford did than to discover that I am false."

Colonel Vyvyan hears the sad news from the Cape with the deepest pity. It is duly chronicled in the *Times*.

All the sympathy of his chivalrous heart is enlisted for his ward, who does not make her appearance downstairs at all that day.

The next morning he writes her a little note, expressive of sincere sorrow for her trouble, and asks humbly, if he may be allowed to see her.

In a very short time he is summoned upstairs.

He enters the door of her pretty room, feeling rather uneasy and distressed, as most men do in the presence of a sorrow they cannot assuage, and finds her sitting listlessly by the window.

She rises hastily, and coming towards him bursts into fresh tears.

He is dreadfully embarrassed for an instant, then he boldly puts an arm round her, and drawing her to a chair seats himself by her side, whilst he smooths her rebellious locks with tender fingers, and calls her his "dear little girl" as he used to do when she was a child.

And this mode of address is so eminently soothing to Miss Carisford, that after a time her sobs die away, and she consents to dry her eyes.

"Now, Evy, I am going to scold you for not telling me of your engagement to this poor boy," says the Colonel, still holding a pretty hand in his muscular grasp.

"I was not engaged to him, Guardy," she replies, stifling a sob.

"Not engaged?" he cries, in evident amazement. "Can it be possible? I was told you were."

"Who could have told you? No one, not even Helen Shafto, knew that he cared for me."

"Ah! so you think, but you are mistaken, childie. And did you not care for him?" asks the Colonel, in a low voice.

"Ah, yes indeed! I liked him very very much, but not quite as I should love the man I marry," replies Evelyn, with a warm blush, as she withdraws herself a little from her guardian's encircling arm.

"He proposed to me at that picnic at Sir Jasper's shooting," she continues; "it was last autumn, just before he left England, and I could not accept him. He begged me so earnestly not to say 'No,' and I felt so sorry for him, and liked him so much, that I consented to wait until he returned from the Cape, when he would ask me again. But, indeed, it has worried me dreadfully, as I did not know what I should say to him."

"Perhaps you would have said 'Yes,' this time," suggests the Colonel, pulling his moustache.

"I am afraid there was no chance of that," she says, sorrowfully.

"Then surely there must be someone else in your mind," returns he, eyeing her tearful face anxiously.

She droops her head, and her tears roll forth afresh.

A sudden impulse tempts him to clasp her to his breast, but he feels that to offer her his love to-day would seem an insult to

the memory of the bright young officer who is gone, so he abstains, and after a moment says:

"Now, my child, you must dry these pretty eyes or they will totally disappear. Remember that there are two of our friends who are in deepest grief to-day, and who call for all our sympathy; I mean Mrs. Beresford and her son. As soon as you can, I should like you to go round there and leave your card, perhaps Mrs. Beresford would like to see you; you are rather a favourite with the old lady, and the fact of having known and liked her poor boy would be a comfort to her."

He rises as he speaks, and goes towards the door.

"I will do as you wish, Guardy; but one moment—who told you we were engaged? Was it Mrs. Carlisle?"

The Colonel smiles, and shakes his head, saying:

"Never mind about that, little one, we will not refer to it again."

"Hateful woman!" exclaims Evelyn, when the door has closed, and clenching her small fist, "I knew she was at the bottom of it all. Horrid creature!"

CHAPTER XII.

AN UNEXPECTED RETURN.

"Thou art rash as fire to say:
That she was false;
O she was heavenly true!"

"HOW thankful I shall be to leave town, it is getting insufferable," said Helen Shafto, as she leaned over the balcony, and looked up and down the hot and dusty street. "How I long for the river and our dear green park; one never appreciates the country till one is out of it."

"Yes," replied her mother, "I must confess that the Court has its attractions. You will have a delightful week at Goodwood if this weather only lasts."

"Thank goodness, Lady Conyers did not include Philip in her invitation," exclaimed Helen, laughing; "he is so cross about it."

"I wish you would not speak so," said my lady, "suppose some one should hear you."

"Oh!" impatiently, "I do not care who hears me."

"By-the-bye, Nell," continued her mother, somewhat nervously, "Philip asked me to—to—"

"What?" asked Helen, eagerly.

"To have a talk with you about the wedding; when will you let it take place?" went on my lady, not daring to look at her daughter's paling countenance.

"Why cannot he speak for himself?" returned the latter, with a scornful smile. "It is a thousand pities he cannot marry you, mamma, you like him a great deal better than I."

"Helen, I am surprised at you," exclaimed my lady, severely.

"Well, do not be angry; as the hateful ceremony must come off sooner or later, I may as well make up my mind for it. Rescue does not seem probable; unfor-

tunately, there are no brave brothers to save me from Blue-Beard's clutches. I trust I shall not go mad like Lucy Ashton, and run a dagger into the unlucky husband."

Lady Shafto drew herself up with her sternest air:

"Helen, if you cannot be serious, and cease talking in this unseemly manner, we had better defer our conversation."

"I am serious enough," replied her daughter, with a hard laugh; "I assure you the prospect of my marriage is a very serious matter to me."

"I had a most kind offer from Lady Clydesdale yesterday," continued my lady.

"Indeed?"

"She has offered you and Philip her house at Redwinter for the honeymoon."

"Much obliged to her," returned Helen, mildly; "and I suppose you accepted it?"

"Certainly, with Philip's approval."

"You appear to have arranged everything very charmingly," said her daughter,

in a sarcastic tone; "may I enquire what other plans you and Philip have made?"

"We thought you would be married at Monks-Hollow in October——"

"Never!" interrupted Helen.

"What do you mean?" asked my lady, aghast at her tone.

"I will not be married at Monks-Hollow."

"Why not?"

"Because I once hoped that I should go there with—with—" here her voice failed for an instant; "but now," she continued, rapidly, "it must be in town."

"You must be out of your mind," said her mother, angrily.

"Then put it off till next year; it will be a respite for me," retorted Helen. "Nothing shall induce me to be married at Monks-Hollow. I should expect to see poor Sir Robert's ghost appear at the altar and forbid the ceremony to proceed. Oh, I wish to Heaven he would! How grateful I should be!" She broke off abruptly, for turning her head she caught sight of Philip

Caryl, who had just entered unheard by them.

Lady Shafto rose hastily and welcomed him very cordially, but she could not help noticing the dark frown that clouded his face.

This is a pleasant surprise, Philip," she said, with a smile; "we thought you had gone to Monks-Hollow until Monday."

"No such luck," muttered her daughter, yielding her unwilling hand to her lover's warm grasp.

Then aloud: "Pray do not leave us, mamma; Philip and I have nothing to say to one another that you may not hear."

"I shall return in a few minutes," replied my lady, "I have a few instructions to give Gibbons."

When the door had closed upon her departing figure, Philip took her chair, and fixing his eyes upon the defiant countenance of his betrothed, remarked:

"That was not a pretty speech I unfortunately overheard, Helen."

"Listeners never hear any good of themselves," retorted she, flippantly.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Shafto, I was not listening."

"Well, we will not quarrel about it, it was the same thing; if you creep about in such a way that no one is aware of your presence, you must very often hear unpleasant remarks."

"Helen, how cruel you are to me! you never give me a kind word or look. Your mother has spoken to you on the subject of our marriage, let it be soon, my darling; it shall be in town or wherever you like, so that you are mine." He spoke eagerly, and took her hand in his, but she withdrew it, as she cried, her heart failing her:

"Oh, no, no! It cannot be yet."

There was a pause, during which she eyed him with a wild despairing look that smote him with something like pity. Then she rose, and said, more quietly:

"It shall be as you like, Philip, in town or anywhere but Monks-Hollow, you and

mamma can arrange it," and then, before he had time to stop her, she had rushed from the room.

"It is better so," she murmured to herself; "this suspense is too dreadful. The thought that perhaps Ray may return maddens me. How could I keep my promise to Philip if he were to come home now?" and then she opened a large gold locket that she wore night and day, and kissed the pictured features of her soldier-lover with heart-broken sobs.

But the welcome news received in England that night of the virtual termination of the Zulu war with the brilliant victory at Ulundi on the fourth of July, served to distract her mind from dwelling on her present situation. Her heart throbbed with painful excitement, as she read the account of the engagement, and knew her lover to be one of that glittering squadron of horsemen breaking forth from the hollow square in hot pursuit of the flying foe.

But presently the paper fell from her nerveless fingers, the room swam before her clouded sight, and a great blackness seemed to envelop her, as amongst the names of those "severely wounded" she saw that of Raymond Vandeleur!

The Monday following she accompanies Sir Jasper and Lady Redgrave to the house they have taken, conjointly with Sir Henry Conyers, for the Goodwood week. Willingly would she stay away, but her mother will not hear of it, so she is forced to hide her sorrow and anxiety as well as she is able.

The weather is lovely, and they have unexceptionable toilettes; but both she and Sylvia are weary and wretched.

Young Darrell, who is one of their guests, easily divines the cause of Helen's lack of spirits, and, as he is one of the best-natured men living, he does his utmost to cheer her up, and bring a smile to her lips.

How hard it is to bear a heavy grief in the midst of gaiety! How intensely we crave for utter solitude to indulge our-

selves uninterruptedly in our sorrow! It is a ghastly task to be obliged to show a smiling front to the world whilst one's heart is breaking beneath its burden of misery.

Lady Redgrave exerts herself to laugh and chat more than usual, but she feels that the whole thing is a bore, flat and unprofitable in the extreme.

George Carew is away, speeding fast as wind and steam can bear him to Norway. He and Sylvia have not met since she had promised him to induce her husband to leave London. Two days later he receives a little note from her; it runs thus:

"I have done as you desired, but without avail; it is best that we should not meet again. Farewell." Then as if she feared he would think these few words cold and unfriendly, she has written a postscript, which makes him happier than a longer letter would have done; it consists of three words only:

"God keep you."

And he takes her at her word. Though he longs to call and see her once more, and bid her good-bye before leaving England, he refrains, since it is her wish. And though she honours him for respecting her behest, yet she is half angry with him for obeying it; she looks for him day after day, until she hears he is gone, when she cries with bitter tears: "I have done right, and I repent already!"

"Sylvia," says Helen, on Friday, as they are resting after the races before dressing for dinner, "for heaven's sake let us leave here early to-morrow morning. Do not think me ungrateful, dear, but I shall go mad if I stay here any longer."

"We will go directly after breakfast, Nell," replies her friend, gently.

"Lady Conyers was proposing to remain till Monday, and intends asking you to do so."

"I am sure I shall not," says Sylvia, energetically, "I am quite as anxious to get home as you are, besides, I cannot leave Flo alone on Sunday."

So the next morning, much to Helen's relief they departed, escorted by Sir Jasper.

"Sylvia, pray come in with me," she entreats, as Lady Redgrave's carriage having met them at the station, sets her down at her own door, "Philip may be here, and I cannot see him alone." And Sylvia accompanies her.

"A gentleman called to see your ladyship this morning," says the pompous butler, as later on her victoria stops at her house, and she proceeds to alight, after a chat with Lady Shafto, who informs her that the wedding is to take place the second week in October, and which she hears with the deepest pity for Helen.

"Did he leave his card?" she enquires.

"No, my lady; he would not, nor his name, but asked if you would be at home to luncheon; he seemed dreadfully put out when I told him your ladyship was not at home, and then he asked if Miss Shafto was staying here."

"Good gracious!" ejaculates Lady

Redgrave, turning a horror-stricken face to the astonished butler.

"What was he like, Simmons?"

"Very tall, my lady, and sun-burnt though he looks ill, with a big scar right down one side of his face, and his left arm in splints."

"Oh! it must be," groans Sylvia, looking as if she should faint.

"When he comes again, Simmons, show him into my boudoir; and when Miss Shafto arrives at three o'clock, ask her into the drawing-room. Be sure you make no mistake."

"No, my lady," replies that portly individual, considerably mystified.

Lady Redgrave has scarcely finished her luncheon when a hansom pulls up at the house, the doors are flung open, and out jumps a young man, who applies himself to the knocker in a way that brings a couple of men servants to the door in hot haste.

Sylvia cannot refrain from peeping out

of the drawing-room as he goes upstairs, and her heart sinks as she catches sight of that upright, soldierly figure, for she recognises Raymond Vandeleur!

A minute later she is face to face with him, and exclaims, holding out her hands:

"I am so pleased to see you again. But I am quite puzzled about you; only yesterday week we saw your name in the paper in the list of the wounded at Ulundi; how on earth did you get here?"

"I thought I should astonish you all," replies Ray, with a ringing laugh, "but I have been ill with fever on and off ever since I got this unlucky cut on my head and face; at Ulundi I had my arm badly fractured by a bullet, after which fever again set in so severely that they shipped me off by the next steamer, thinking I was in a bad way, but the sea air set me all right again, though, of course, my arm is at present quite useless. But enough of myself, how is Helen? I was nearly writing to her last night, but then I

thought I would take her by surprise. She is well is she not?" he asks, eagerly scanning Lady Redgrave's paling countenance. "What makes you look so strange—is there anything wrong?"

"She is well," says Sylvia, feeling she would give worlds to run away. "Did you get her letter last mail?"

"No, unfortunately, I just missed it; it must have arrived the day after I left."

"Oh!" she thinks with a groan, "he knows nothing; I shall have to tell him—what shall I say to him?" At the same time she feels thankful that she is able to save Helen this pang.

"You have bad news for me, I can see," he cries, the expression of happy expectancy dying out of his handsome bronzed face. "Tell me the worst at once, I can bear it," he continues, firmly.

"Sylvia clasps her hands together nervously, and says, in a faint whisper:

"She is engaged to ——"

He starts as if he were shot, and exclaims:

"Engaged? Is it possible?"

Then with a sudden impulse, his voice, broken with uncontrollable emotion:

"Ah God! I know what you have to tell me: she is engaged to my cousin!"

Sylvia is too much moved to speak, she only nods, and then turns away, her eyes brimming over with tears at the sight of his agitation. Presently she lays a hand upon his shoulder, and says, gently:

"Helen is not to blame; you must not judge her harshly; let her tell you all the painful circumstances connected with this unhappy affair?"

He raises his head, and is about to speak, when a well-known voice calls:

"Sylvia, may I not come in? Simmons says you are particularly engaged," and Helen Shafto appears on the threshold; then catching sight of Raymond, she stands transfixed with astonishment, whilst an expression of the intensest love and joy

illumines her sweet face, as exclaiming:

"Great Heaven, am I dreaming!" she flies across the room to him; but the lovely flush dies out from her cheek, as he puts her back with a stern gesture, and fixing his eyes upon her, says;

"Is this true what Lady Redgrave tells me, that you are engaged to Sir Philip Caryl?"

Helen tries vainly to reply, but the words refuse to come from her trembling lips; she sinks into a chair, and covers her face with her hands.

He gives a laugh in which anger and contempt are blended, and continues passionately:

"So this is your constancy! Scarce nine months since we parted, and I come home to find you betrothed to my cousin—and oh! how I have longed for this meeting: to see you once more: to hold you again in my arms, my own true-hearted love! to what a fate have I returned! Would to

God that I had died before discovering how base and false a woman can be!"

He breaks off abruptly; something like tears rushes into his eyes as he looks at her. How he has thought of seeing her again! How he has counted the days and hours that must elapse before he at last presses her to his heart; and now that they are together, they are as completely separated as when the ocean rolled between them!

But the break in his voice gives her courage, and she stretches out her hands to him imploringly, saying:

"I deserve all your reproaches; but for pity's sake hear what I have to say."

"I will hear nothing. I only know that you, the woman I have worshipped, and would have trusted before all the world, are false—false——," then he stoops, picks up his hat, and holds out his hand to Lady Redgrave, who has been gazing blankly out of the window for the last ten minutes

He cannot speak, and she says, softly:

"I will not let you go like this, Raymond. You do not know all, or you would pity instead of condemn. Hear what Helen has to say. She has had a great deal of trouble to bear since you went away, do not make her more unhappy, poor child."

But he mutters hoarsely:

"She is false!" and with a despairing look at her bowed form, he rushes downstairs and out of the house.

At the sound of the closing door Helen turns towards her friend, her face of marble pallor, and whispering;

"I can bear anything now, surely the bitterness of death is past," falls senseless on the floor.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PRICE HE ASKED.

"O, beware, my lord, of jealousy;
It is the green-eyed monster which doth mock
The meat it feeds on."

IT would be impossible to describe the utter consternation of Philip Caryl upon hearing that his cousin is in England. He actually trembles at the idea of meeting him; he knows it is his bounden duty to look him up, but he would far rather face a whole regiment of Zulus.

But the next evening he meets him on the steps of the club, and pulling himself together with a tremendous effort, goes towards him, and offers his hand, saying in a would-be hearty voice, "Very glad to see you, Raymond, hope you are better."

Ray eyes him with cool contempt as he replies:

"I would sooner shake hands with the lowest beggar in the street than with you. I wonder you have the audacity to address me."

"Come, come, do not bear malice," says Philip, backing into the house, for he does not altogether like his cousin's manner; "besides, you know, if the lady prefers me ——" he does not have time to finish his sentence for a blow straight from the shoulder levels him with the floor, and as he staggers up, half-stunned, Ray walks quietly into the smoking-room, saying:

"You are a liar and a cheat, or you would not be in your present position."

The moment Philip recovers himself he rushes at him, but two or three men present separate them.

"You shall pay for this!" gasps Philip, half-choking with rage, his nose and eyes red and swollen.

"Unfortunately, duelling is actionable in the British Isles," remarks Raymond, coolly, as he lights a cigar with infinite composure;

"but if you do not object to a trip to Boulogne, I shall have the greatest pleasure in affording you every satisfaction."

"Thank you, I have no intention of being shot like a dog," retorts the other, sulkily.

"Perhaps the law may be able to offer you redress."

"Neither have I any desire to drag my name through the police courts. No," laughs Philip, with ill-concealed triumph, "I shall have every satisfaction from you on a certain day in October," and as he speaks he hands a Court journal across the table. There duly chronicled is the announcement that the marriage of Sir Philip Caryl and Miss Helen Shafto will take place early in that month.

"For the present you may go scot-free," sneers Philip, gazing with delight at the other's white and drawn face, "as I have all the winning cards in my hand I can afford to be magnanimous," and with this parting shot, which he sees goes straight

home, he goes out, hails a hansom, and departs to his rooms to be doctored.

Of course this story goes the round of the clubs and receives a good many additions to it, but fortunateiy there are but few people in town, otherwise it might make more sensation than it does.

The next day is Sunday, and Helen, feeling too ill and unnerved to go to church, is sitting in the drawing-room alone when Philip is announced.

She has no time to escape from the room, or she would do so.

His first words bring the colour to her face in a crimson flood, for grasping her hand savagly, he bursts out:

"Have you seen Raymond Vandeleur?"

"I have."

"Perhaps I have to thank you for the blow he gave me at the club last night."

She starts; it is the first intimation she has received upon the subject, and he perceives at once that it is so.

"If he struck you, I should think the

less said about it the better," she replies, contemptuously.

"Where did you see him?" he enquires.

"I decline to be questioned in this way. It cannot matter to you."

"But it does matter to me; do you imagine I am going to let him meet you about, and make love to you?" he goes on angrily.

Her lip curls, as she shrugs her shoulders, which indifference almost maddens him.

"A nice game you and he will be carrying on behind my back, unless I put a stop to your acquaintance at once," he cries. "Remember, for the future I distinctly forbid you to speak to him or notice him at all."

"And I distinctly refuse to obey you," she returns, in cold, cutting accents. "I am not your wife yet, thank God; until I am in that most unenviable position I shall do exactly as I please."

Beside himself with rage, scarcely aware

of what he is doing, he seizes her in his arms, and exclaiming:

"By Heaven! you shall no longer refuse to me what he has so often claimed," kisses her passionately on cheek and lips.

She thrusts him from her with all her force, and says in a low concentrated voice of mingled disgust and anger, her face white as death, her eyes blazing with indignation:

"You are not yet able to insult me with impunity. Go; there is your ring" (flinging it upon the table); "I would not marry you now to save twenty fathers from ruin. Never dare to enter my presence again," and, her graceful figure drawn up to its fullest height, she points to the door.

At this moment, as he stands irresolute, gnawing his moustache in sulky wrath, Lady Shafto enters, and, looking from one to the other, remarks:

"Are you quarrelling? Whatever is the matter?"

"You may well ask," returns Philip, with

a short laugh, as Helen, still quivering with excitement, sweeps past him and out of the room. "Simply, your daughter has given me my *congé*."

"Impossible!" ejaculates my lady, aghast. "What could you have done to annoy her?"

"Merely told her that my precious cousin chose to assault me most savagely last night at the club, and requested her—not unreasonably, I think under the circumstances—to cut him in future. Upon which she flew into a passion, almost flung my ring, or rather her ring, at me, and told me she would not marry me to save twenty fathers from ruin.

"Upon my word," cries he, lashing himself into a rage, "I think it is just as well; I had no idea she was such a temper."

"My dear Philip, pray say no more about it; Helen is hasty, but she will be sorry enough when she has time to reflect. These lovers' quarrels are soon made up, you know," says my lady, soothingly.

"But I see your eye is swollen, what a blow he must have given you! I should have returned it with interest."

"So I should," muttered Philip, with an ugly frown, "had not two or three officious brutes rushed between us; but I shall have my revenge one day."

He puts his hand up to the discoloured optic which, though well painted, still presents a somewhat unusual appearance, and inwardly curses his cousin.

Lady Shafto administers a judicious amount of sympathy, and at last has the satisfaction of sending him off in a more equable frame of mind.

Were it not for the knowledge that he has the power of inflicting the deepest suffering upon Raymond by marrying Helen, he would be almost tempted to take her at her word, for he almost hates her to-day; but by so doing he will throw her into her lover's arms; so he determines that nothing shall induce him to give her up, and when he returns to his rooms he sits

down and writes her a very humble letter of apology, begging her to reconsider her decision.

And she, knowing how utterly they are all in his relentless grasp, and overcome by her mother's entreaties, consents to be re-chained, feeling that after all it does not very much matter, now that everything is at end between Raymond and herself.

The next day they are all to leave London for Shafto Court, and, meeting Lady Redgrave at the station, Helen hears with the deepest grief that Vandeleur is very ill with a return of fever. Probably the shock he has received at the news of her engagement, aggravated by the excitement of meeting his cousin has proved too much for his weakened state.

"How did you hear this?" she asks, anxiously.

"Sir Jasper went round to his rooms this morning, thinking to do the civil, as he calls it, and saw his servant, who said he was very ill, slightly delirious, and he had

sent for his doctor, who thought it right to have a second opinion, as his arm seemed greatly inflamed."

"Oh!" groans poor Helen, "and he has no one to nurse him."

"Yes; his man had telegraphed for Mrs. Foster, now Mrs. Bates, you know, and he expected her every minute."

"Oh, thank God!"

"I sent round some grapes, and asked the servant to let me know how he is going on, and if there is any immediate danger. So do not make yourself uneasy, Nell; Mrs. Bates will take care of him: she is a splendid nurse."

This advice was very good, but unfortunately Helen could not follow it. She longed to go to her lover's side and help to nurse him through his illness. The enforced inaction was terrible to bear; if only she had not been compelled to leave town, the thought that she was near him would have been some slight comfort to her, and she could have sent Gibbons to

his rooms to enquire after him every day. But now, even this small consolation was denied her.

Meanwhile, the preparations for the wedding were begun, and Helen nearly worried to death with regard to trousseaux, jewellery, and other feminine articles, supposed to be necessary when a lady enters the matrimonial state.

On the occasion of Philip's first visit to Shafto Court after their engagement was renewed, the subject of Lady Clydesdale's kind offer of her house for the honeymoon was again broached, and, much to his annoyance, she had again firmly refused to accept it.

Dearly as he loved his future bride, he was a keen sportsman, and the prospect of some thousand acres' grouse shooting was not to be despised.

"Where will you go, then?" asked Lady Shafto, out of patience.

"I want to travel; let us go to Italy,

and home by Paris. I should go mad, cooped up for a fortnight in a house with one person," with a wrathful look at Philip, who muttered:

"You are too bad, Helen!"

"Then I will not be married at all—I have allowed you to arrange everything as you please, I will not give way in this. I mean to enjoy my trip abroad thoroughly," with a bitter laugh. "I shall spend more money in a month than I have ever had before; what is the use of marrying a man with thirty-thousand a year, if one does not——"

"That will do," interrupted he, thoroughly annoyed by her flippant tone, so different to her usual subdued sweetness.

Lady Shafto was then called away, and Philip, drawing his chair close to the side of his fair betrothed, said, softly:

"You have not yet told me that I am forgiven."

"Do not refer to what is past," she

returned, coldly; "I would rather forget that unpleasant episode."

He did not reply, but going to a side table brought a large morocco case and laid it in her lap.

"Let this atone for my bad behaviour," he said, with a smile.

She touched the spring, and disclosed a splendid suite of diamonds. Necklet, bracelet, and a small circlet for the head, all of the finest brilliants.

"They are not half good enough for you, my darling," he continued, as the words of thanks died away on her lips, "Only do me the honour to wear them on our wedding-day."

The colour faded from her cheeks at his words, and she replied, gazing at the flashing gems:

"I am a bad bargain, Philip; you will pay a long price for me."

"Good Heavens! do not talk to me like that; one would think you were a horse or a picture," he cried, impatiently, covering her hand with kisses.

She withdrew it gently, and rising, placed the jewels on the table, where they glittered from their purple background like stars in the deep azure of a summer night.

"I hate him," she thought, "and the diamonds are the emblem of my future, hard, cold, and brilliant." Fortunately at this juncture her mother entered, and went into raptures over the gift.

"What a lucky girl you are, Helen!" she said, as she opened the case. "Suppose you try on these splendid ornaments," and taking the circlet she tried to place it on her daughter's head.

"No, indeed," cried Helen, "do you not know it would be very unlucky to wear them before the wedding," she added, seeing Philip's brow lower. "Now let me take them upstairs and put them away in the iron safe."

Glad of an excuse to leave them, she took her mother's keys, and disappeared.

After Philip had departed, my lady took her to task for her ungracious manner.

"Really, Helen," she began, "you are enough to try the patience of Job. He brings you diamonds worth a prince's ransom, and you receive them as if they were rubbish; I must insist upon your being kinder to him."

"Has he been complaining to you?" enquired her daughter, angrily.

"No, but I could see he was much annoyed."

"I wish you were going to wear the horrid things instead of me," retorted Helen.

"If I were, I should certainly behave a little better to the donor," said my lady, severely; "I cannot imagine what you are about to be so ungrateful and unkind to him. His settlements are generous in the extreme; have you no curiosity to know what you will possess?"

"No, none," returned Helen, gloomily.

"He settles three thousand a year on you for life."

"All the money in the world will not

compensate me for the sacrifice I shall make on that terrible twelfth of October. I would far rather be some poor hard-working woman with a husband whom she loved than myself. How gladly would I work for the man I love! I should want no pin-money to make me happy," said Helen, breaking down with a despairing sob.

"Bah! you talk like a fool, and I have no patience with you," retorted my lady, sweeping angrily from the room.

* * * * * *

The next day Philip spent with his lawyers, and went down to Shafto Court, to stay the night, quite tired out.

The harvest moon was sailing grandly in the purple vault of heaven as he emerged from the dining-room, and spying a white dress on the lawn, made his way to where his *fiancée* was sitting, enjoying the soft night air, and the quietude which lay around.

She was anything but pleased at the

interruption, for her thoughts were comparatively happy ones. That afternoon Lady Redgrave had sent her the latest bulletin from town, to the effect that Raymond was a shade better, and this good news had considerably lightened her heart.

Philip, having obtained permission to smoke, Helen being a sensible girl, and not pretending to dislike the scent of tobacco, drew his chair close to hers, and said:

"Would you like to know what I have been doing to-day?"

"Yes," replied she, listlessly.

"I have been making my will."

"Indeed?" with an accession of interest.

"Would it please you to know that I have left Monks-Hollow to you for life?"

"And at my death to whom will it revert?" she asked, eagerly.

"It will be entailed and therefore descend to the nearest heir."

"Oh! pray do not leave it to me, it would make me perfectly wretched. Indeed you must not."

"Then to whom should I leave it?" he enquired, with a lowering brow.

She did not reply for a minute, feeling terribly nervous at what she was about to say; then:

"To your cousin, Raymond."

He smothered an oath, and said in a low, deep tone:

"I wonder you dare ask me such a thing; you must be mad."

"I am nothing of the kind. Monks-Hollow was intended by Sir Robert Caryl to revert to Raymond; he told him so only the night before he was taken ill."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Philip, impatiently; "if such were the case, which I much doubt, why did he leave no will?"

"Some people think that there was a will, and that it is still hidden in some drawer or secret recess in the old house," replied Helen, little thinking how near she was to the truth. If she had not been occupied in caressing her favourite poodle at

that moment, she must have noticed how his face blanched to a deadly whiteness.

"Do not repeat these idle tales to me," he said, turning away to light a fusee; "I have quite determined that Monks-Hollow shall descend in a direct line to the Caryls. Failing a direct line, it goes to a distant cousin, of whose existence I was unaware till last week, but the lawyers informed me of it, and thus Raymond Vandeleur has no chance of inheriting it," and he laughed softly.

Helen looked at him quietly, scorn and hatred written on every line of her lovely face. Then overcoming her repulsion, she laid one hand upon his arm and her head upraised, said earnestly:

"Do you love me, Philip?"

"Do I love you?" he repeated, his whole being stirred at the close proximity of those violet-blue eyes, gazing into his with thrilling sweetness, of that small crimson mouth so temptingly near his own.

He put an arm round her, and held her close, exclaiming:

"I do not love you, I worship you; I think I would sell my very soul to awaken some responsive chord in your heart!"

"Do not say that," she murmured, withdrawing herself somewhat, rather alarmed at the warmth she had evoked. Then, after a pause, "If you love me so much, you will do anything to please me."

"I will do anything to please you, but I will not to please or benefit my cousin," he replied, obstinately.

She started away as if a snake had stung her, saying:

"I am sorry I tried to ask a favour of you. You are always telling me you love me and you would die for me, and all that kind of nonsense; when I put you to the test you are wanting entirely."

She rises, and, her head proudly erect, begins to beat a retreat; but she has not gone more than a few paces when he is after her. He feels that to have her again within his arms, her face close to his, he

will willingly forfeit Monks-Hollow a dozen times over.

She comes back to her seat without hesitation.

"Nell," he says, fixing his eyes upon hers, "I know what you wish me to do. You ask me a hard thing, but for love of you I will do it. No, hear my conditions," as she utters a pleased exclamation. "Your caring for my cousin does not make me any more amiably disposed towards him. And you do care for him," he adds, wistfully, with a heavy sigh, "I would that I were as well loved by you. I wonder if you love him sufficiently to give up all claim to him," eyeing her eagerly.

"I do not understand."

"If I die without heirs, I will leave Monks-Hollow to him, on condition that he does not marry you. Will that satisfy you?"

A tide of colour suffuses her cheek as she replies, indignantly:

"He would not wish to; he will not even speak to me now."

"Indeed! So he has cut up rough?" says Philip, with a sneer. "I am very delighted to hear it: the best thing he could do under the circumstances."

She turns away for a minute, and hides her face in her hands to think. Death seems very far away from Philip just now, he seems much more likely to seize Raymond for his prey. Perhaps she may die herself; anyhow it may benefit her lover, so she answers:

"Suppose he will not accept the conditions?"

Philip frowns angrily:

"Then the estate will go away. I will have the codicil drawn up to-morrow, and you shall see it signed. But when done, may I claim a reward?"

"Yes,"hesitatingly; "what is it?"

"Will you give me six kisses?" pleadingly.

"What nonsense!" she exclaims, with indignation.

"Then I shall not accede to your re-

quest. You are very hard upon me; I wonder what other man engaged for so long would stand what I have from you."

"You know how I hate such demonstrative conduct," she returns, impatiently,

"Doubtless you have not always been of of that opinion," he says, watching her narrowly.

She flushes deeply, and turning to him with defiance in her eyes, answers:

"I will give you three; but not one more, even for Monks-Hollow."

"Well, I suppose I must be content: 'Half a loaf is better than no bread.' May I have one on account now?"

"No!" emphatically, and she walks away, and disappears within the house.

He, left alone, paced up and down the gravel walk, finishing his cigar.

The thought that Monks-Hollow might be the means of keeping Raymond and Helen apart pleased him greatly. It was scarcely probable that the former would forfeit the estate to marry his detested cousin's widow,

and the idea of his reward filled him with rapture. The remembrance of those kisses he had snatched a week ago seemed burnt into his brain; the anticipation of those soft red lips pressed willingly to his, made his pulses thrill;

"Ah!" he groaned, "if only I could make her love me, I would give everything I possess!"

The codicil has been witnessed and signed in the presence of Helen and her mother, who thinks she is only fit for Bedlam, to throw away a fine estate in this reckless, wilful manner. The lawyer has departed, and Helen and Philip are left alone.

"Thank you very much, Philip," she says, holding out a white hand nervously. "I am ready to give you your reward," with a hot blush.

He smiles, and says:

"When a man is starved you do not usually give him much to eat at once, but feed him gradually. I am equally starved,

so, I will take one now, and two this evening."

She looks at him coldly and shrinkingly, and replying :

"Be it so," holds up her face for an instant, all too short for him, who would prolong it for a life-time ; his lips rests on hers : then, before he has time to arrest her, she has broken from his impassioned clasp, and disappeared.

"How I hate myself!" she thinks, when alone, as the tears rush to her eyes. "Still, it is for my darling's sake, and I can bear anything for him—if only the task were over, but there are two more to be given, and I dare not go back from my word!"

Again it is evening, and the soft south wind fans his flower-perfumed wings athwart the window of the drawing-room, and cools Helen's burning cheeks, as she sits looking out upon the dark expanse of wooded hill and valley, where the long, black, restful shadows lie upon the dewy grass, and night

droops "her sabled skirts all fringed with light from the celestial walls" o'er the still world!

But she is in no mood for calm repose, her whole soul loathes what she must do before the evening is over. She is a prey to nervousness; her mother even would be a source of comfort to-night, but she has retired early with a bad head-ache, and Philip is having a cigar with Sir Felix.

It is only nine o'clock, or she would run away too, but she dares not for want of a reasonable excuse.

As she sits and muses, the sound of a footstep on the gravel sets her heart beating, though not with pleasure, and in another minute Philip is beside her. He kneels down, leaning his elbow on the broad sill, and says, tenderly:

"My darling, I have been longing to come to you, but Sir Felix had so much to say to me that I could not get away sooner."

"Do not apologise, I have been very happy," she returns, coldly.

He bites his moustache, whilst she looks out over the star-lit garden, and wishes herself a mile away. Presently he turns, and taking her hands, exclaims, passionately:

"Why are you so cruel, so cold to me? Will the love I give you never meet with any response?"

"How can I answer you!" she returns, with dignity. "Have I not told you over and over again that nothing will ever make me change? One cannot force love; you know perfectly well that mine is already given."

He buries his face in his hands as she speaks, and to her utter dismay something like a sob escapes him, at the sound of which her tender heart softens, and she says, gently:

"Why ask me these useless and painful questions? I am to be your wife, surely you might be content. Believe me, though I do not love you, I will do my best to make you a good wife."

"Do not insult me with your submission," he retorts, rising and approaching the door, "when a man is starving for bread he does not want to be offered a stone. I absolve you from your debt, knowing full well with what reluctance you would pay it."

Then, a tempest of rage and envy against his cousin warring in his heart, he goes out, and she is again alone.

CHAPTER XIV.

WILL YOU FORGIVE ME?

"Oh! this separation
Has made you dearer, if it can be so,
Than ever you were to me;
You appear
Like a kind star to my benighted steps,
To guide my way to happiness."

RAYMOND VANDELEUR had had a very sharp attack of fever, and his arm, having been badly fractured, had been giving him a great deal of pain and trouble; but, thanks to the good nursing of Mrs. Bates and the unremitting skill and attention of his doctor, he was now on a fair way to recovery; in fact, they were rather astonished at the rapidity with which, having once turned the corner, he had arrived at convalescence. But they were unaware that the key to the mystery

lay in the receipt of a thick packet forwarded from the Cape, in which was Helen's last letter.

After the fever from which he had been suffering had somewhat subsided, he had sunk into a state of apathy, from which it seemed well-nigh impossible to rouse him; but after the perusal of that most despairing epistle, his usual energy and activity of mind reasserted their sway, and he was seized with an overwhelming desire to get well.

Mrs. Bates was fairly puzzled at his sudden accession of spirits and general restlessness, and found all her work cut out to keep her refractory patient within bounds. One afternoon he was lying tossing to and fro on his couch, groaning occasionally at his enforced inaction, and the feeling of utter weakness and lassitude, which was the natural result of his illness, when she entered with a basket of large purple grapes and a box of hot-house flowers.

"Some one is very good to you," she remarked, bringing them to his side, with a smile.

"Lady Redgrave, I suppose," he answered, listlessly.

"No, sir, her ladyship's box came the day before yesterday," returned Mrs. Bates, rearranging the sun-blinds, for the hot August sun was blazing down upon the windows, and scarcely a breath of air came in from the dusty street.

"Who are they from then?" he enquired, with a shade more interest.

"I do not know, sir, but this is the fourth box. Comes by train from Kirkham; see, here is the label," and the old lady smiled rather knowingly as Raymond seized the card eagerly, and a slight flush rose to his sunken cheek, as he thought of the possible donor.

After a long pause he said, impatiently:

"Mrs. Bates, I cannot stand London any longer. I am pretty strong again now, and I mean to go down to Monkton, and

you shall let me a room in your pretty cottage."

Mrs. Bates stared at him aghast, and exclaimed:

"It is'nt half good enough for you, sir."

"Nonsense, old woman; don't argue about it, for I mean to go. I long for a breath of fresh pure air and the sight of the green fields and the river. You sit down at once, like a dear old soul, and send a line to Bates, telling him we shall be down to-morrow afternoon."

"Lor, sir! whatever will the doctor say?" remonstrated she, somewhat taken aback at the suddenness of the proposal.

"The doctor be blanked! I am sick of the very name of them! All I want now is country air and rest. Let me have my own way, old lady, you may tyrannise over me as much as you please when once I am in your house, but go there I will."

Mrs. Bates knew that argument was useless when her young master, as she persisted in calling him, had made up his mind; but,

at the same time, there floated through her mind visions of white curtains to be put up, snowy draperies to be arranged, carefully hoarded silver to be polished up, and delicate dishes to be prepared, before he could possibly be received in her small domain.

So she resolved to temporise, and, after a good deal of discussion, it was arranged that Bates should be telegraphed for to take his wife's place whilst she returned home to get the place ship-shape, as she called it, and that they would then come down to Monkton, two days hence.

The doctor, who came in after the telegram had been despatched, was greatly in favour of the plan, as London was anything but health-inspiring now, and took his leave with many injunctions as to careful diet, early hours, and freedom from fatigue or worry.

And so, two days later, Raymond found himself rather knocked up with the journey, but supremely happy, ensconced in Mrs.

Bates's comfortable, roomy, and lavender-scented cottage near Monkton, and within a mile of Shafto Court. Since the receipt of Helen's letter his sole desire was to see her again, to tell her how bitterly he repented his hasty and unjust reproaches, and he felt sure of her forgiveness, knowing full well the depth and strength of her love.

But he dared not write to her, so, as usual, determined to seek counsel with Lady Redgrave, who seemed to him a kind of guardian angel, without whose help his best efforts were useless.

Accordingly, a couple of days later, Sylvia was surprised at hearing him announced, and greeted him with unfeigned pleasure, congratulating him upon his recovery, though inwardly commiserating his altered looks and general air of weakness and delicacy.

His face had lost its bronzed hue of health and grown sharper, and something had gone from it never to return—the expression that only youth and good

spirits can give; but it had gained in strength and resolution The firm contour of the mouth and chin were more marked, and there were lines across the broad brow which had only appeared during the last few weeks, and were the witnesses to the "furnace of living pain," mental and physical, in which the human heart is tried as gold in the fire.

After a few enquiries respecting his illness, she asked where he was staying, and was rather amused at the idea of the cottage.

"You must come to us for a few days," she said, smiling, "Sir Jasper will be delighted to see you."

"You are very good to me, Lady Redgrave, indeed I cannot half thank you for all your kindness to me, but Bates and his wife look after me so well, that I shall stay with them for the present. Perhaps you will let me pay you a visit occasionally."

"Come whenever you please," she returned, simply.

"I could not remain in town another day," he continued, "for amongst the letters forwarded to me from the Cape was the one Helen wrote me last. When I think of all she must have suffered I feel overcome with shame and remorse at the brutal way I treated her at our meeting. I cannot rest until I have seen her and begged her forgiveness. Will you send for her here this afternoon?" Then breaking off with a smile, "What should I do without you, Lady Redgrave? You have been the best friend that two unhappy lovers ever had."

She laughed, saying:

"I knew you would be sorry when you learnt the truth of this terrible affair; it would punish you to make you wait until to-morrow, but, after all, I suppose I must take pity on you. I will send her a line at once, and you shall stay to luncheon with me. I am quite alone, for Sir Jasper is in town to-day."

"Thank you a thousand times!" he

exclaimed heartily. Then, hesitating: "Do you think she is very angry with me?"

"Dreadfully. I doubt if she will even speak to you. I have not told her that you are here or she might not come," replied Sylvia, addressing her note, and thinking a little fright might not be amiss.

"Pray do not joke about it," he groaned, pacing the room with impatient strides.

"If she is engaged and cannot come I shall go out of my mind."

"Nonsense," returned she, coolly; "you will work yourself into a fever if you continue in this strain. Come sit down and tell me all the news. I daresay a little refreshment would not be unwelcome after your hot drive," ringing the bell.

A glass of iced hock and seltzer being brought, Raymond calmed his perturbed spirit as well as he was able, and passed a pleasant hour in the cool, shady, perfumy drawing-room in friendly converse with his hostess upon the past season, the late war, and various topics of the day.

Presently Lady Redgrave exclaimed:

"What can you think of me! I have not congratulated you upon your promotion and gaining the Victoria Cross. How pleased you must be."

"Yes," he said, a flush of pride rising to his cheek, "but I did nothing to deserve it. I would give it up willingly to see poor young Beresford alive again," and his voice broke, and his eyes grew misty as he thought of the hastily-made grave so far away.

Sylvia murmured a few words of deep sympathy from her heart, for she had been greatly attracted by the frank, winning manner and endearing qualities of his dead comrade.

Luncheon was half-over when the servant returned with Helen's reply, and Raymond watched Lady Redgrave open it with ill-concealed impatience.

"There," she said, with a smile, tossing it across to him, "you can read it for yourself;" and judging from the flash of light

that illumined his countenance, the contents of that pencilled note were eminently satisfactory.

An hour later Lady Redgrave is writing in her boudoir, a cosy nest of peacock velvet, Madras muslin and lace; and outside the open window paces her guest in a fever of expectancy, too anxious even to smoke.

Sylvia smiles to herself as she watches him, and then half sighs as some lines of Campbell's come to her mind;

> "Love's a fire that needs renewal
> Of fresh beauty for its fuel;
> Love's wing moults when caged and captured,
> Only free he soars enraptured."

"Evidently," she thinks, "he was a poet who understood human nature—and knew that possession clips the wings of the saucy god to an alarming extent. I wonder if he would be as devoted to her after six months of matrimony; I suppose I ought not to doubt him, but in all probality he would be like the generality of men and

take his wife's affection as a matter of course, thinking himself extremely hardly used if she dared to remonstrate with him upon his altered manners and increasing indifference."

Just then the object of her thoughts put his head in at the window, and exclaimed, eagerly:

"I can see her coming up the hill; may I go and meet her?"

"No, certainly not! you will keep out of sight until I tell you."

Upon which cruel reply he vanished.

Meanwhile Helen walked quickly up the sloping lawn, little thinking who was so earnestly watching her and inwardly chafing at her—to him—slow progress, and stepping into the boudoir, said quietly, though her voice shook:

"What is wrong, Sylvia? I hope you have no bad news for me."

"No, my dear," returned Lady Red-

grave, smiling, and pulling an arm-chair for her into the shade, "I think you will consider it good news."

"Is it about Raymond?"

"Yes, he has left town."

"Really? Is he well enough for that? I am glad," replied Helen, throwing her hat and gloves on the table. "And where is he now?"

"Well, I am not quite certain at this moment, but I have an idea that he is not very far from here."

"Sylvia! I hope I shall not meet him. The remembrance of that terrible interview haunts me. I cannot bear his reproaches, though I deserve them," and she wrung her hands, and looked the picture of grief.

But at this instant Raymond, who had been hovering outside the door, could stand the suspense no longer, but marched boldly in, and Sylvia slipped noiselessly away, leaving them alone.

Upon seeing him, Helen had uttered an

exclamation of surprise and fear, and now sank into a chair, burying her face on her folded arms, which rested on the table, but not before he had noticed how pale she had become.

Gazing at her with infinite love and sorrow, he knelt beside her, and putting his arm round her slender waist whispered:

"Do not turn away from me, Nell, I have come to ask your forgiveness—I have behaved like a perfect brute to you."

No answer—only a stifled sob.

After a pause, during which the arm clasped her a little closer, he said, pleadingly:

"My darling, won't you tell me you forgive me? I have been so utterly wretched lately, and when I got your letter from the Cape, I felt I could not rest until I had made my peace with you again."

"Then," in a more lively tone, "come, Nell, I am sure my shoulder would be more comfortable than that hard table," and at this stirring appeal, Miss Shafto

raised her head, and her eyes shining through their tears, like violets bathed in dew, a tender smile curling her red lips, she looked stedfastly into the dark steel-gray orbs so near her own, and with a low cry of rapture was caught to his heart.

All too soon the afternoon passes for them; they have so much to talk about; the future they carefully avoid mentioning, the present is all-sufficient for them in the intense happiness of their reunion.

"How anxious I have been about you," says Helen, softly. "You have been very ill?"

"I suppose so," he replies, lightly.

"And I heard your arm was so bad again; is it getting better now?"

"Yes; there is every chance for it now; at one time, you know, the doctors thought I must lose it, then they extracted a piece of splintered bone, and we hope it will be all right."

"Oh, how dreadful!" (shuddering) "how you must have suffered!"

"Well, I did rather. But these are not pleasant things to tell you, my darling. Pray who was the good little Samaritan who sent me flowers and fruit all the time I was ill?"

"Lady Redgrave, of course."

"And Miss Shafto, also. I know all about it, Nell, so don't try to look so innocent. I did not deserve it, but I appreciated your kindness greatly; flowers are such a pleasure to an invalid, and help to while away many a weary hour; and I had the happiness of thinking that these white hands had gathered them for me. I am not much of a carpet knight now, am I?" he continues, with a laugh; "rather a battered old veteran. Do you remember the game we used to play at long ago?—'I am a poor old soldier just come from the wars, what will you please to give me?'"

"I remember," she says, tenderly marking with a soft little finger the scarcely-healed scars upon his temple and cheek.

"What would you like me to give you now?"

"Whatever you please, madam," he replies, affecting indifference, whilst his eyes look eloquently into hers.

After a moment, he goes on:

"I wonder you are not ashamed to say anything to such a maimed object."

"Ashamed indeed!" she cries indignantly. "I like you ever so much better with all these wounds. If you only had one leg or one eye you would be all the dearer to me."

"Then I had better be off and get rid of these convenient members as soon as possible," he says, laughing.

"Don't be silly! I fear I love you far too well already," gravely. Then throwing an arm round his neck as he bends over her, "Oh! my darling, I am so proud of you! Everyone speaks so highly of you, and Colonel Vyvyan says he hears on the highest authority that——"

"That will do, you little goose!" he in-

terrupts, stopping her mouth with a kiss, whilst she gazes up at him with the deepest love, pride, and admiration, shining in her eyes.

"By-the-bye, Nell, I have brought you such a lot of things from Zululand. They are all in a box at my rooms."

"Oh! how good of you! What have you brought me?"

"There are some shields and assegais, a set of Zulu jewellery, the complete dress suit of a young lady, and other curiosities."

"Really. Do send for them. What is the full dress of a lady like?"

"Well," laughing, "there is not very much of it, and what there is consists chiefly of beads. There are also some curiosities for Miss Carisford and Lady Redgrave. We will have the box down as soon as I can send for it; I think the contents will amuse you."

But here they are interrupted by Lady Redgrave, who summons them to tea on the lawn.

The sun was blazing his fiercest, and scarce a breath of air stirred the water-flags and rushes, as Evelyn Carisford paddled down the stream the next morning, on the way to Shafto Court.

A large straw hat shielded her pretty, dark face from the too amorous glances of the sun-god, and her white cambric dress adorned with ribbons, set off her trim figure to great advantage.

"Is that you, Nell?" she called out, as she neared the boat-house, and descried a pink cotton gown reclining in a boat.

"Yes," returned the pink cotton, rising; "so glad to see you—have you come to stay?"

"As long as you will have me," answered Miss Carisford, tying the bow to an overhanging branch, and stepping out. "How comfortable you look, to be sure! Have you room for me? I am so hot and tired; I assure you nothing but the deepest affection for you, my dear, would have induced me to row here in such broiling heat;" and

she dropped down beside Helen, who reclined on a pile of cushions under a low-spreading tree, and looked the picture of coolness and repose.

"Of course you know that Captain Vandeleur is at Bates's cottage?"

"Yes, and I saw him yesterday. This is a secret, Evy, so don't peach, as the boys say."

"Oh! what fun!" exclaimed Evelyn. "Does not Sir Philip know, nor my lady?"

"No, not a soul."

Evelyn laughed heartily. She was not aware of all the unhappy circumstances that had led to her friend's engagement with Philip Caryl, but she knew quite enough to assure her that it was no fault of Helen's, and pitied her accordingly. Raymond she had transformed into a hero, and her admiration of him knew no bounds; she had not met him since his return, and now confided to Helen that she was dying to see him and have a long talk about the war.

"He will call at the Priory as soon as he can, Evy."

"Guardy is away visiting in the North, or he would have looked him up directly." Then with a sudden inspiration, "Nell, do you not think we might go and see how Mrs. Bates is?—we have not taken her any tea for ever so long."

Helen laughed and considered; she had been vainly endeavouring to find some excuse for going in that direction, and hailed the proposition with delight, but said, hesitatingly:

"We shall get into a dreadful scrape if mamma hears of it; she would be horrified at the idea of us calling upon a bachelor."

"Nonsense," replied Evelyn, with decision, "that is just why I want to go because everyone would be shocked. Now, listen! after luncheon I will row you to the bridge, which is scarcely five minutes' walk from the cottage, and we will leave the boat with the old ferry-man. Do not say another

word or I shall get angry. Only we must not forget the tea."

"What a determined person you are, Evy! I suppose you must have your own way; at all events it is much too hot to argue. Now we will send up to the house for some lemonade and peaches; you must be thirsty."

* * * * * *

Meanwhile Raymond had been a victim all the morning to one of his violent headaches, to which he had lately been very subject. He could neither read nor write, but lay back in his easy chair, under the big mulberry-tree on the shady little lawn, longing for Helen's soothing presence, and wishing he had made some arrangement for meeting her that afternoon.

Presently he fell into a refreshing slumber, and after some time awaking with a start, found to his utter astonishment Miss Carisford and his lady-love watching him, and who laughed heartily at his discomfiture.

"You are not to move," said Evelyn. "Mrs. Bates told us we might come and sit by you on condition that we did not wake you. We have been as still as mice, have we not, Helen?"

"And how long have you been contemplating me?"

"About ten minutes."

"Really!" said he, joining in the laugh. "I hope I did not snore."

"No, you slept most peacefully."

"What about gloves?" asked he, much amused.

"I had a mind to win some, but Helen wouldn't let me. Very selfish of her, was it not?" and with this retort Evelyn ran away to give Mrs. Bates her tea, and have a chat with the old lady.

"How good of you to come, my love!" said Raymond, turning to Helen; "I have been longing for you all day."

"Poor boy! Mrs. Bates says you have had such a bad head-ache. But I must charm it away," and she seated herself on

the edge of his chair, and producing a large black fan, and some Eau de Cologne began to sprinkle some on his head.

The touch of her soft hands, the sound of her low voice, and the gentle motion of the fan, all soothed him imperceptibly; and after an hour he declared himself quite well.

"Now, Nell, we will go in and look up Mrs. Bates; she will let us have tea out here."

And a very pleasant repast it was with Evelyn's merry laughter and repartee to keep them from dwelling on any sad thoughts.

After Mrs. Bates's delicate cakes, honey and clotted cream had been consumed, the girls said they must go; before they departed, Raymond asked Helen to meet him the next afternoon at Beech-hurst, and then led Evelyn into the sitting-room, as he had something to say to her.

Handing her a packet, he remarked, gravely:

"Here is a ring, Miss Carisford, that I know you will value for the sake of one that is gone. I took it from his finger the morning he died, and have kept it for you, feeling sure that there is no one who could prize it more dearly than the girl he so fondly loved. He spoke of you on that terrible morning, and bade me give you his love. He had a note case—I do not know the donor, perhaps you do—but at his request it was buried with him."

Evelyn took the ring, the tears running down her cheeks, and pressing his hand, said in trembling accents:

"I did not like to ask you about him; thank you so much for all your kindness. Do not think that because I laugh and seem in good spirits that I have forgotten him; I can never indeed do that. I am so much obliged to you for this ring; I will always wear it for his sake."

Raymond accompanied the girls to the gate, and watched them till a bend in the

road hid them from his sight, but they had not gone far before they came face to face with Sir Philip Caryl, who advanced to meet them, his countenance dark and lowering.

Without any greeting, he began:

"Have you been to Mrs. Bates's cottage, Miss Shafto?" and the tone of his voice made Helen's cheek pale.

"We have been there," she replied, looking at him steadily.

"To see that fellow, I suppose!"

"To whom do you allude?" enquired Evelyn, reddening with anger.

But much to her amazement he paid not the slightest attention to her, but continued to address his *fiancée*, who stood like a statue, her hands tightly locked together.

"If you have anything further to say on this subject, I should recommend your keeping it until we reach home," she returned, with icy contempt, "unless you wish the whole village to hear you."

"I don't care a hang who hears me?"

he exclaimed, beside himself with rage, "a pretty fine thing indeed for my future wife to be spending the afternoon in a bachelor's rooms. I will not stand it."

"Perhaps you will kindly listen to me," said Evelyn, her small figure quivering with suppressed indignation; "I had occasion to go to the cottage, and I asked Helen to accompany me. She would not have gone if I had not persuaded her."

Helen made a gesture of dissent, and Philip, with a muttered oath, returned:

"It is all an infernal plot, for Helen to spend the afternoon with Vandeleur. You, Miss Carisford, I suppose, are the catspaw."

This was too much for Evelyn, who drew herself up haughtily, and looking him full in the eyes, remarked:

"Amongst gentle-people, Sir Philip, there is such a thing as honour, perhaps you are unaware of the fact; permit me to recommend it to your notice."

And with this parting shot, which told

visibly, she pressed Helen's hand, and tried to draw her away. But the latter would not stir, so after a few whispered sentences, Miss Carisford walked off with her head in the air until out of sight, when she sat down under the hedge, and cried fit to break her heart, at her friend's sad fate.

And Helen gazed after her, wishing she had not left her; then she turned towards home without vouchsafing a word to Philip, who kept up a running fire of complaint against her.

Presently, she said, quietly:

"That will do, Philip, you have said quite enough; Evelyn told you the truth, so please drop the subject."

"Will you promise me not to meet him again?" he answered, morosely.

"I can bind myself to no promise."

Baffled and angry, he could say nothing. Curses loud and deep were in his mind, but he knew better than to let one pass his lips; so after glaring at her for a minute,

he turned abruptly on his heel, and walked rapidly away.

In a short time he was face to face with his cousin, who was not at all astonished to see him swinging up the gravel path evidently in a violent rage.

"May I ask the reason for this intrusion?" asked Raymond, coldly.

"I have come to know by what right you invite Miss Shafto to spend her afternoons here?" demanded Philip, in loud and angry tones.

"I should recommend you to be careful in your remarks," replied his cousin, slowly, with a gleam in his eye, which boded no good to his rival.

"That is no answer to my question. I come down to see her; she is out, no one knows where; chance at last leads me in this direction, and I find her just leaving this house."

"With her friend, Miss Carisford," interpolated Ray, quietly.

"Ha, ha! you must take me for a

cursed fool to be so easily hoodwinked, but that game won't do. Honourable conduct, I must say on your part, to make love to my promised wife."

"The least said about 'honourable conduct' the better," returned the other, in contemptuous accents; "you are not likely to know the meaning of the term; do you call it honourable to barter a woman for so many thousand pounds? You have taken Helen away from me by sheer treachery, making a detested marriage with you the only alternative to her father's ruin and disgrace; you see, I know all. But Helen is not your wife yet, and until she is, I give you fair notice that I shall meet her when and wherever I can."

"You dare say this to me!" gasped Philip, his face white with passion.

"Yes; and I dare say a great deal more if you will only listen," returned the other, with exasperating coolness.

"If you marry her, I will ruin her father utterly," blustered Philip, but at

this moment the door opened, and Mrs. Bates, very stern and important, entered, and looking from one to the other, said:

"Excuse me, gentlemen, but as I heard loud talking, I thought it better to come in. Captain Vandeleur has been very sadly all day, and the doctors told me to be sure and keep him very quiet, so, meaning no offence, Sir Philip, would you kindly say 'Good-night' and leave him."

Raymond, who had turned very pale and seemed thoroughly knocked up made no comment, and Philip, seeing it was useless to prolong the interview, took up his hat and left the house.

"Men ain't the same as they was in my young days," remarked Mrs. Bates to her husband that night; "why don't he get a coach and four and just carry her off to Gretney Green. That's what they used to do."

"Rubbish!" ejaculates her worthy spouse; "they don't do no such things now-a-days. Besides, Sir Philip is that

rich, and between ourselves they do say as Sir Felix owes him money, and so he's got a sort of hold over him. Poor Miss Helen, she's a dear young lady, she is!"

"Well, I know if I was the Captain I shouldn't let fathers and debts stand in my way, I should just take her off and marry her. Lor, what a row there'd be, how I should enjoy it to be sure! And what a handsome couple they'd make!"

"There, that'll do," said the old man, testily; "you'll get into trouble with that long tongue of yours some day."

The next day Philip went up to town, and was closeted with his lawyers, and did not return to Monks-Hollow for a week.

Neither did Helen hear from him. But she was too happy to care whether he was displeased or otherwise. In the society of her lover everything seemed joyous, and so the time slipped by, bearing her nearer and nearer to her fate!

END OF VOL. II.